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MELVILLE AND MOTHER:  
MYTH AND SYMBOL IN THE EARLY NOVELS

by  
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A THESIS  
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES  
IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE  
OF MASTER OF ARTS

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

EDMONTON, ALBERTA  
SEPTEMBER 23, 1963



## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this thesis is to investigate the archetypal figure of the mother in Melville's first seven novels in the belief that on its deepest level Melville's art is a reworking of the ancient and universal myth of the hero's attempts to free himself from the Eternal Mother, who represents the instinctual, intuitive, "unconscious" side of the psyche, that side which is eternally at war with reason, authority, and law--the conscious principles upon which society is constructed. Melville himself seems to have an ambivalent attitude to the feminine part of his psyche: he recognizes its creative, life-giving potential while at the same time fearing its destructive power. This ambivalence manifests itself in the relationship between the heroes of his novels and symbols of the mother which they encounter, particularly in Mardi, Moby Dick and Pierre.



Mephistopheles: Hier diesen Schlüssel nimm.

. . . .  
Merkst du nun bald, was man an ihm besitzt?  
Der Schlüssel wird die rechte Stelle  
wittern,  
Folg' ihm hinab, er führt dich zu den  
Müttern.

- Goethe's Faust



TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. INTRODUCTION . . . . .	1
II. <u>REDBURN</u> AND THE LOST MOTHER. . . . .	8
III. THE QUEST FOR THE MOTHER . . . . .	21
IV. <u>MARDI</u> : THE TWO FACES OF THE MOTHER. . . . .	36
V. AHAB AND "THE TERRIBLE MOTHER" . . . . .	45
VI. <u>PIERRE</u> : THE FATAL UNION WITH THE MOTHER . . . . .	58
FOOTNOTES. . . . .	69
BIBLIOGRAPHY . . . . .	78



## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

American Literature contains perhaps no greater irony than that the work which seems best to exemplify the flight of the American male from the world of mothers and wives to the masculine world of the ship is dominated by the archetypal image of the mother. A century ago amused disbelief would have been the reaction of virile enthusiasts for sea fiction to an interpretation of Moby Dick that suggested Ahab was really chasing his mother. In the intervening century, however, the work of Frazer, Freud and Jung in the fields of mythology and psychology has given a new dimension to literary criticism. There are surely few authors in the last two centuries in either England or America to whom this new dimension brings more enlightenment than Herman Melville. His work has puzzled critics for over a century. It puzzled even Melville himself. Both he and the critics sense the "little lower layer,"<sup>1</sup> but neither he nor they are sure what that layer is. In a letter to Hawthorne in 1851 Melville speaks of his novels as "paper allegories"<sup>2</sup> and expresses gratitude that Hawthorne has understood Moby Dick, but in another letter of about the same date to Mrs. Hawthorne he confesses that he did not intend a "subtile significance"<sup>3</sup> which she found, and that while vaguely aware that the book "was susceptible of an allegorical construction, and also that parts of it were,"<sup>4</sup> many of the meanings were revealed to him only after Hawthorne had pointed them out to him.

One wonders what would have been revealed to Melville himself about his work if he had been more consciously in possession of the knowledge of myth, primitive culture and psychology, and the relationship between them, that we have now. Although Arvin insists that the word "symbolism" in its literary bearing "had not come into use at the time Moby Dick was written,"<sup>5</sup> Melville must surely have come across the word in his reading of the English Romantics. Nevertheless, he does not apply the word to his own work, and unless we are intended to take as ironical Ishmael's protest that his story is not "a hideous and intolerable allegory,"<sup>6</sup> Melville could not find any literary term adequate to point the way to "the little lower layer." He had produced something too complex even for



his own understanding. Like a mother who discovers to her surprise that the child she has brought forth from her own body is a separate and inscrutable being, Melville must have felt that he had brought forth from his unconscious a strange monster that he could only partially understand. His creative imagination ran before the psychologists, mythologists, anthropologists, and archetypal critics, but we owe it to his genius to apply what they have learned in our attempt to understand "the ambiguities" which so troubled Melville that he "made up his mind to be annihilated."<sup>7</sup>

In this thesis we can hope to explore and apply only a small section of this vast mountain of learning but enough, we hope, to give a few new insights into the meaning of Melville's work. In spite of the twentieth-century revival of the interest in symbolism of which Eliade speaks<sup>8</sup> in The Myth of the Eternal Return, and the popularity of the psychological cult in criticism, surprisingly few of Melville's critics have attempted an interpretation of his work based upon one of the most important indirect contributions to literary criticism made in the twentieth century, Jung's theory of "individuation," the inner drama of the growth of the psyche, which is manifested through symbols in the myth and folklore of primitive peoples and in the literature of civilized man. These symbols he calls "archetypes of the collective unconscious."<sup>9</sup> One of the most important of these archetypes is the mother, and the role she plays in the process of "individuation," or the inner drama of growth, civilized man ignores at his peril. In Jung's discussions of archetypes, "mother" is almost synonymous with "anima," that is, she is "the personification of the collective unconscious"<sup>10</sup> and even "the archetype of life itself."<sup>11</sup>

W. E. Sedgwick's The Tragedy of Mind published in 1944 seems to be the first serious study of Melville's works as comprising a record of "the drama of human growth,"<sup>12</sup> of "an unfolding of inward vision, a vision not so much of life as of what it is to be alive, and alive as a complete human being and not a mere two-thirds or three-quarter of one,"<sup>13</sup> but it was not until Newton Arvin's study of Melville<sup>14</sup> in 1950 that a full-scale application was made of what psychology has discovered about the relationship between literature and the psychological processes of the writer. He speaks of Moby Dick as being on one plane "an oneiric or dream-



like projection of Melville's unconscious wishes and obscure inward contests . . . . It shares with a dream. . . its sources in the unconscious, its dependence on irrational symbols, and its power to give expression to deep, instinctive, irrational fears and desires."<sup>15</sup> But no one has bothered to explore these "irrational symbols" to any great extent. There have been hints of sexual and phallic symbolism in the novels but no one has gone the whole way and proclaimed that Melville's fiction is a variation of the ancient myth of the son-lover who castrates himself as punishment for the incest he has committed or "as a means of preventing or expiating the incestuous longing,"<sup>16</sup> that is, he sacrifices his instinctuality in order to attain the spiritual freedom of higher consciousness, and in so doing condemns himself to a fruitless quest to recover what he has lost. The heroes of these ancient myths, says Jung, "are usually wanderers, and wandering is a symbol of longing, of the restless urge which never finds its object, of nostalgia for the lost mother."<sup>17</sup>

It is "the lost mother" in Melville's first seven novels with which this study is concerned. It will include a consideration of the various symbols through which she manifests herself and of the aspects of reality which she seems to represent for Melville. Like all of Melville's symbols, those of the mother are highly complex and ambiguous. His own hesitancy in applying the word "allegory" and his preference for the word "analogy" suggest that he would agree with Jung when he says, "Symbols are not signs or allegories for something known; they seek rather to express something that is little known or completely unknown."<sup>18</sup> The complexities and ambiguities are therefore inevitable, but they will bother us less if we do not insist, as naive critics are wont to do, on taking the symbols too concretely. "We are puzzled," says Jung, "at every turn by the endless contradictions of myths. But we always forget that it is the unconscious creative force what wraps itself in images."<sup>19</sup> If we remember this we will not be led astray into a naive and limiting preoccupation with Melville's private and personal psychological quirks. We are not concerned here with Melville's relationship with a particular flesh-and-blood mother, but rather with the eternal mother, the mother-imago, the powerful pagan goddess who heaves her bulk from the depths of the unconscious, and, like the jealous Aphrodite of Sophocles' "Phedre," wreaks a terrible vengeance if she does not get her due homage. Who is she? What is she?



That is Ahab's puzzle and Melville's too. She is a force that gives life ("the archetype of life itself") and that threatens to take it away. She is nature, instinct, fertility, impulse, sexual and creative energy. She is the Mother of All Living, a deity of mysterious proportions,<sup>20</sup> "the White Goddess"<sup>21</sup> (a white whale perhaps?); she is that whole realm of being from which man must deliver himself if he is to have spiritual autonomy but with which<sup>w</sup> must come to terms if he is to escape her wrath.

The mother then represents something within the individual himself with which he must be consciously reconciled if his spiritual growth is not to be stunted. Her part in the "inner drama" is of prime importance and must be understood if the individual and society are to be saved from disaster. To summarize Jung's theory of her role,<sup>22</sup> the anima, the term he gives to the feminine element in the male personality, is the most important of the archetypes of the collective unconscious. It lurks in the deepest levels of the instinctual, primordial realm of the psyche, the source of "libido," which in its narrow sense means sexual energy, but in its wider sense, the sense in which Jung most frequently uses it, it means energy generally, creative energy, or "an energy-value which is able to communicate itself to any field of activity whatsoever, be it power, hunger, hatred, sexuality, or religion".<sup>23</sup> (In another place he refers to it as "subjective intensity"<sup>24</sup>). In order to direct the energy of the libido outward, away from the self, the psyche seeks an object on which to "project" the anima. For the child the most immediate object is the mother; hence she is "the first carrier of the anima image."<sup>25</sup> The growing consciousness of the child, however, "demands separation from the mother"<sup>26</sup> and comes in conflict with the unconscious, incestuous desire to return to her, the basis of which is, "as every sun myth shows, the strange idea of becoming a child again, of returning to the parental shelter, and of entering into the mother in order to be reborn through her."<sup>27</sup> The alternative to incest is the transference of erotic energy to other anima-projections, which may take the form of "mother analogies thrown up by the unconscious."<sup>28</sup> When this happens the individual is still not free of the power of the mother over him: he unconsciously still longs for her and for the life-giving forces she represents, while at the same



time fearing the threat of regression to the original prenatal union with her.

It is with this ambivalent and ambiguous attitude to the "mother analogies" in Melville's novels and to the realm of the human psyche they symbolize that this study is concerned. That the spiritual problem we have described in Jungian terms above was Melville's own problem, projected in mythological symbolic patterns in his novels, is the argument of this paper. That Melville at least had a problem is surely evident to any perceptive reader. If we are justified in identifying Melville with his heroes, then two things become forcibly apparent: he was lonely, and there was something curiously amiss in his relationship with both his own and the opposite sex. All of his heroes, from the narrator in Typee to Pierre are restless wanderers, "in tormented chase of that demon phantom that, some time or other, swims before all human hearts."<sup>29</sup> They are all victims of a strange loneliness that cannot be wholly satisfied by either the conventional romantic heroine or erotic attachment to male companions. As Mason points out in The Spirit Above the Dust (1951), "Moby Dick begins and ends in loneliness. . . Ishmael is discovered alone on land; he is left at the conclusion of the tragedy alone upon the sea."<sup>30</sup> But Moby Dick, as we hope to show in later chapters, is not the only novel haunted by a lonely-orphan.

Even more obvious than their loneliness is the curiously sexless existence led by Melville's heroes. While his compatriot, Henry Adams said, "The proper study of mankind is woman,"<sup>31</sup> Melville omitted woman entirely from his greatest novel, and in those in which she does appear she is an unreal, bloodless, idealized and remote object of romantic courtship. Even the Polynesian Fayaway, whose race has since become the object of anthropological studies of sexual customs, is a Victorian maiden whose sisterly affection for the hero is tiresomely chaste. Lewis Mumford seems to be the only one of Melville's biographers who has paid much attention to this aspect of Melville:

All Melville's books about the sea have the one anomaly and defect of the sea from the central, human point of view: one-half of the race, woman, is left out of it. Melville's world, all too literally, is a man-of-war's world. Woman neither charms nor nurtures nor threatens;



she neither robs man of his strength nor rouses him to heroic frenzy; she is not Circe; she is not Rosalind or Francesca or even the wife of Bath-- she simply does not exist. When the Pequod spreads sail, woman is left behind. . . . he who captured to the full the poetry of the sea, became as bashful as a boy when he beheld Venus, born of its foam, rising from the waters he knew so well, the most unexpected of monsters, and the only denizen of the sea he dared neither snare nor harpoon nor otherwise dispose of, except by flight. . . .<sup>32</sup>

But Mumford does not explore the possibility, as we shall, that although woman is not present in his novels in literal human terms, she is very much there in symbolic terms.

Melville's loneliness and his tendency to keep woman at a distance comprise only one aspect of a more important and more universal problem. His novels betray an awareness, however vague and confused, of two opposing forces in the human psyche, of "two antagonistic agencies within him,"<sup>33</sup> an awareness of being "caught between eternal and autonomous opposites,"<sup>34</sup> called variously Coelus and Terra, spirit and matter, head and heart, intellect and feeling, conscience and impulse, civilized man and primitive man, conscious and unconscious, good and evil, God and Satan. The difficulty arises when he tries to decide which is God and which is Satan. This difficulty is manifested in his ambivalence to the mother-imago, which represents for Melville one of these opposing forces. Is one to submit to her or to destroy her? She is desirable because she is the source of love. All the affections which bind men together are "derivatives of the feelings which bind the mother and her offspring, and consisted originally of these and these alone,"<sup>35</sup> says Briffault in his mammoth sociological study, The Mothers, and again, "The maternal instinct alone is primitively 'altruistic;' every sentiment that has made social aggregation possible by checking self-regard owes its existence to that primal love."<sup>36</sup> To destroy the source of love within oneself, as Melville is aware, is to destroy oneself, and ultimately the society, of which one is a part. On the other hand, the mother represents a grave danger, for she tries to lure the individual back into her world, back into the unconscious oblivion of the instinctual. She tries to destroy the social structures and respectable systems erected by conscious man and make him



submit to her primal will. What then is one to do with her? This is the great enigma of Moby Dick and of all Melville's novels.

The study of this enigma in Melville is interesting not only because it helps us to understand the soul of a great artist, but because it throws light on a central problem of the western world. Western man has tried to get rid of the pagan goddess. He has cut himself off from the world of instinct in his pursuit of the paternal principle of higher consciousness, but in so doing has cut himself off from the source of life itself. "Yet the longing for this lost world continues and. . . is forever tempting one to make evasions and retreats, to regress to the infantile past, which then starts throwing up the incestuous symbolism."<sup>37</sup> Much could be said about modern America in the light of this statement alone.

Moby Dick might in fact be called America's greatest myth. It has indeed the proportions of myth as outlined by Eliade:

There is no myth which is not the unveiling of a 'mystery', the revelation of a primordial event which inaugurated either a constituent structure of reality or a kind of human behaviour. Thence it follows that, because of its own mode of being, the myth cannot be particular, private or personal. It can establish itself as a myth only to the extent that it reveals the existence and the activity of superhuman beings . . . ."<sup>38</sup>

The story of Ahab and the great white whale fills, as well as any ancient myth, these qualifications. Its symbols, as Arvin has so well said, "transcend the personal and local and become archetypal in their range and depth; . . . they are inexplicit, polysemantic, and never quite exhaustible in their meanings."<sup>39</sup> It is the earnest hope of the writer of this thesis that the investigation of some of these meanings will not seem an attempt to reduce an artist of gigantic proportions to an object of naive psychological suppositions. Such is not the intention of the study.



CHAPTER II  
REDBURN AND THE LOST MOTHER

Redburn published in 1849 is the fourth of Melville's novels. It marks a return, (after the failure of his first attempt, Mardi, that strange mixture of allegory, romance, and satire, to save himself from the fate of going down in history as a writer of cannibal stories for children<sup>1</sup>), to what he calls in a letter to Richard Bentley "a plain, straightforward, amusing narrative of personal experience--the son of a gentleman on his first voyage to sea as a sailor--no metaphysics, no conic-sections, nothing but cakes & ale."<sup>2</sup> The book is, he insists, based wholly on his own observations. We therefore have Melville's own words to justify us in using the book as an autobiographical account of his own "First Voyage". It is important to remember, however, that the book is a novel, and one written when Melville had already reached a considerable degree of artistic maturity. It is not so important as a record of actual outward events as an early artistic projection of that inner drama of which we spoke in the introduction.

Although chronologically the book comes forth in Melville's writing career, it is convenient in this study to consider it first because it marks the first stage in Melville's quest for spiritual maturity; it is a record of the first thrust of the fetal psyche outward from the enclosing world of home, family, and American society. Secondly, treating Redburn first provides an opportunity to say something about that enclosing world, whose loss was an inevitable necessity but from the deprivation of which Melville never quite recovered.

The enclosing world of infancy has certain characteristics which, unless a child is abnormally deprived of the essential requirements of physical and emotional survival, apply universally. It is a world, first of all, dominated by the figure of the mother. She is the source of all that is pleasurable, protection, nourishment, comfort. Her gifts are unconditional; the child need do nothing but accept them passively. She is for a while the only principle of existence. His uncontrolled instinctual impulses are directed toward her and she responds to them. The maternal and feminine comes to represent for the child, therefore,



instinctual desire gratified, "the secret memory that the world and happiness may be had as a gift."<sup>3</sup> With his maturing consciousness, however, the child gradually becomes aware of another principle in the universe, the paternal one. The father represents that principle which opposes pure instinctuality,<sup>4</sup> authority, discipline, convention, tradition. Desire is not always to be gratified; it must sometimes be controlled. As the child becomes an adult he learns that these opposing principles - the maternal and paternal are not external principles but internal ones. If he is to reach spiritual maturity and autonomy he must free himself from both father and mother and strike a balance within himself between the principles they represent.

There is nothing in the first ten years of Melville's life to suggest any marked aberration from this pattern. He seems to have had, in fact, an unusually normal, comfortable, affectionate, happy family life. The Melvilles, says Arvin, were "quite a typically 'good' New York family of the decade, prosperous, cultivated, traveled, genteel."<sup>5</sup> According to the hints we get in Redburn, Herman seems to have had a close and affectionate relationship with his father, a widely travelled importing merchant, who told him stories of sea travel and took him on excursions to wharves and docks to watch the ships. His mother, during this period at least, was "warmly maternal, simple, robust, and affectionately devoted to her husband and her brood."<sup>6</sup> If his parents were monsters then they were monsters, says Mumford, who in the New York of the early nineteenth century could be "duplicated many times over."<sup>7</sup> Melville himself seems to idealize his childhood as a kind of Paradise:

Then I never thought of working for my living, and never knew that there were hard hearts in the world; and knew so little of money, that when I bought a stick of candy, and laid down a sixpence, I thought the confectioner returned five cents, only that I might have money to buy something else, . . . (p. 34)

If there was anything wrong with Melville's childhood it may be that it was too attentive and too indulgent, like the 'child-centred' home of twentieth-century North American society. Perhaps, as Mason says of the hero of Pierre, his world was "of a kind to protect him from hardship rather than prepare him for it."<sup>8</sup> There are hints, in both the facts of his



biography and in the novels, that it was a world in which the maternal principle was dominant. This may have been because Maria Melville (Mary Glendinning in Pierre) was, as one biographer has suggested, a "far stronger and more positive character than her accomplished husband."<sup>9</sup> Could this perhaps account for the prevalence of the queen imagery throughout Melville's writing, particularly in Moby Dick and Pierre? Could it be that Melville's childhood world was a matriarchal one, ruled by a queen rather than a king? Redburn provides a clue: the first chapter devoted several paragraphs to the description of a glass ship which was "the wonder and delight of all the people of the village" (p. 6). The ship was called La Reine, and "this Queen rode undisputed mistress of a green and glassy sea" (p. 8). Even more pointed is "the secret sympathy" that existed between the writer and the "gallant warrior" who fell from this ship "into the trough of a calamitous sea" (p. 8).

If Melville' childhood was matriarchal, his adolescence was even more so. When he was thirteen, an especially crucial age in a boy's emotional development, the relative normality of his early life was severely disturbed by the death of his father. Two years previously his father had gone bankrupt and never recovered from the disaster. In January, 1832, he became deranged and died, leaving Maria and eight children dependent on the grudging charity of relatives. It was a crushing blow for the whole family but doubtlessly affected Herman most of all. "Deprived of an idolized father on the very verge of adolescence, the boy Melville underwent--can there be any doubt?--an emotional crisis from whose effects he was never to be wholly free."<sup>10</sup>

Ironically, however, the important aspect of this crisis is not the bereavement itself, but the consequent disappearance from his life of the maternal principle. The death of his father wrenched him from a world in which the ruling principle was tenderness, gentleness, security, and thrust him into one in which the principle of existence was struggle, hardship and discipline. There were in the bereaved family five children younger than he, three of them girls, so there was no possibility of his staying in school. His survival was now in his own hands. In his characteristically picturesque and sensitive style Mumford describes the



young Herman's predicament:

All Herman's ambitions, to go to college, to become an orator, like Patrick Henry, to become a great traveller, like Uncle John or Papa, or to become a great general, like Grandfather Peter, to live in Paris, like Uncle Thomas, to make the name of Melville somehow glorious-- all these dreams were like great bonfires suddenly drenched by cold rain. . . . The stream of life had suddenly stopped; its margins became stagnant; there was no way out; . . . Cold, bitter cold as December, the world seemed to young Melville.<sup>11</sup>

The problem was greatly aggravated by the personality of his mother, Maria Melville, as she appeared to the eyes of the seedling writer. The leading biographies of Melville offer contradictory opinions as to the kind of Mother she was, or at least became, upon being abandoned in the world with the responsibility of eight children. Gilman says her "entire attitude toward her son was a mingling of love with the hope that he would prove himself both good and useful. . . One can hardly imagine a more normal mother,"<sup>12</sup> while Weaver argues that all Melville's "passionate cravings for sympathy, for affection, were rebuffed by her haughty reserve,"<sup>13</sup> and that

The oral traditions that survive of her do not halo her memory. She is remembered in such terms as 'cold', 'worldly', 'formal', 'haughty' [a word Melville often uses], and 'proper'; as putting the highest premium upon appearances . . . .<sup>14</sup>

Mumford speaks of her "aloof rectitude" and says that "Herman stood as in a cold room before an open fire: one side of him was toasted, another side was chilled."<sup>15</sup> Arvin describes her as "exacting, aggressive, overbearing, haughty, and worldly."<sup>16</sup> The majority of opinion, then, seems to be against Gilman. Since our concern, in any case, is with her role as an 'anima-projection,' it is the image of her that Melville's artistic imagination created that is important. If Mrs. Glendinning in Pierre is a portrait of Maria Melville as the adolescent Melville remembers her, then Weaver, Arvin and Mumford are not far wrong in their descriptions.

If Melville's nostalgia for an idealized, almost paradisal childhood justifies us in assuming that Maria Melville, at least in the first few years of Herman's life, was a fairly feminine and motherly woman, it may



have been the death of her husband that caused the stiffening and hardening of her personality. The change is not so difficult to understand. Maria had now to be both father and mother to her children. She had to suppress the mothering instinct and assume the role of authority. She had to become spiritual and moral guide to her children, the role psychologically and archetypally that of the father.<sup>17</sup>

What happened to her at this time, however, may not have been so much a change as a new emphasis on traits of her character which were already present before her husband's death. We have already suggested that she may have been the more forceful partner in the marriage. Like Mrs. Glendinning she was, after all, the daughter of a general. Her father, General Peter Gansevoort, had defended Fort Stanwix against the British in 1777, capturing colours and drum from St. Leger's expedition. His only daughter's manner and bearing may have caught something of the father's military pride. The martial element seems, in any case to have influenced Melville's notions of femininity. One of the few erotically attractive women of whom we catch even a glimpse in Redburn, a passenger on the ship, is described as "a martial, military-looking girl; her father must have been a general" (p. 105); and of Mrs. Glendinning in Pierre Melville says, "Her stately beauty had ever somewhat martial in it; and now she looked the daughter of a General, as she was . . ." (p. 26). Maria Melville had, furthermore, the education and tastes to go with such a haughty and dignified appearance. Her family had been one of the wealthiest in Albany, and she had been educated by private tutors.<sup>18</sup> "She valued good food, low voices, courteous servants, correct manners . . ."<sup>19</sup> She no doubt felt that her maiden name entitled her to a place of authority in life. Perhaps she "stooped a little to marry a mere trader."<sup>20</sup> But if such was the case she would at least reign supreme in her own home. Weaver cites a telling anecdote about her enthroning herself each afternoon upon a high four-poster to rest, with her children (her army?) "seated silently on a row of low stools ranged on the floor at the side of her bed."<sup>21</sup>

Such a woman would slip easily into the new role she was called upon by fate to play. The seriousness with which she took the role is revealed



in a letter she wrote to her son Allan in 1841:

Do not go out in the Evening with young men, but stay at home and study, go to bed early, be pure in mind, think purely, and remember that from the heart proceeds all evil, & learn to keep your heart with all diligence.<sup>22</sup>

From the heart proceeds all evil! This from a member of that half of the human race which is supposed to embody the wisdom of the heart! If such was the essence of her moral teaching, we can understand the adolescent Melville's rebellious cry in Pierre, "The heart! the heart! 'tis God's anointed; let me pursue the heart!" (p. 127).

Maria Melville's fear of the heart may have been to some extent the result of her religious background. She was a member of the Dutch Reformed Church, a denomination rooted in the Christian Humanist tradition of the superiority of the reason over the passions. She herself, says Gilman, "Was well furnished with the pious phrases necessary to preserve equilibrium."<sup>23</sup> After her husband's death furthermore, the religious tone of her household "seems to have become increasingly intense. . . . one hears of formal family prayers, of the reading of religious tracts, of a somber observance of the Sabbath."<sup>24</sup>

1832, then, marks an important turning point in Melville's spiritual development, not only because he lost his father, but because at an age when he would be experiencing, simultaneously with the bereavement, a natural erotic awakening, he lost the mother he had known as a child and still craved. Jung speaks of "the masculine principle in the mother."<sup>25</sup> This principle gained the upperhand in the character of Maria Melville. Abandoning her role as the warm, loving, emotional instinctual, intuitive, feminine mother, she became a kind of impostor, usurping the functions of the father. If Melville throughout his life remained confused by the apparent ambiguity of the sexes, part of the explanation may be found in the personality of his first "anima-projection."

It may have been an unconscious attempt to escape from the frustrating relationship with his mother that Melville responded to an opportunity to go to sea in 1839, after "spasmodic employments as bank clerk, ship assistant, farm worker and teacher."<sup>26</sup> Eleanor Melville Metcalfe records in Herman Melville: Cycle and Epicycle that his elder brother Gansevoort, who was working in a law office in New York, arranged for Herman to join



the crew of a Liverpool trader.<sup>27</sup> The letter he carried with him from his mother to Gansevoort suggests his state of mind at the time: "Herman is happy but I think at heart he is rather agitated."<sup>28</sup> The agitation could be perhaps explained merely by the suddenness of the departure. It "came too swiftly to prepare for the emotional impact of breaking away from the family circle."<sup>29</sup>

It was inevitable that, however enthusiastic the young Herman may have been about the prospect of adventure on the high seas, the sudden breaking of the umbilical attachment to home was to be indeed a severe emotional shock. Even though the previous seven years since his father's death had been hard, still they could not have prepared the nineteen-year-old for the hard life of a trading vessel whose motto was "Obey orders, though you break owners" (*Redburn*, p. 27). This young son of a gentleman, member of the Juvenile Total Abstinence Association (p. 40), and accustomed to the society of four chaste sisters and of a mother who worried about his handwriting,<sup>30</sup> was now thrust into the rough and vile company of sailors who "swore so it made [his] ears tingle" (p. 32) and who cared little about how he felt as long as he did his share of disagreeable work, cleaning out chicken coops or making up the beds of the pigs in the long boats. His mother was now replaced by superiors "who never gave reasons for anything they order to be done" (p. 27). He was indeed in a parentless world, and the sense of being an orphan, "a sort of Ishmael" (p. 60), which had been growing in him since his father's death must now have reached a climax. "All of us yearn for sympathy, even if we do not for love; and to be intellectually alone is a thing only tolerable to genius, whose cherisher and inspirer is solitude" (p. 267). Melville could hardly have known so soon that he had the genius to make his loneliness, his "longing for the lost world,"<sup>31</sup> not only tolerable but productive.

The longing for the lost world of the mother persists throughout young Wellingborough's adventures. When one of the sailors mentions his mother's name he says that it enraged him

that a man whom I had heard swear so terribly, should dare to take such a holy name into his mouth. It seemed a sort of blasphemy, and it seemed like dragging out the



best and most cherished secrets of my soul, for at that time the name of mother was the center of all my heart's finest feelings, which ere that, I had learned to keep secret, deep down in my being (p. 38).

The most important evidence of the persisting attachment to the mother, however, is the prevalence throughout the novel of "mother analogies." The importance of the sea as a symbol in Moby Dick has kept critics busy for the past half-century, but it has some symbolic value in the earlier novels as well, including Redburn. In spite of the harshness of his life on a trading vessel, the young hero feels a powerful, almost mystical attraction to the sea. He is fascinated by its contrasting moods:

Never did I realize till now what the ocean was: how grand and majestic, how solitary, and boundless, and beautiful and blue; for that day it gave no tokens of squalls or hurricanes, such as I had heard my father tell of; nor could I imagine, how any thing that seemed so playful and placid, could be lashed into rage, and troubled into rolling avalanches of foam, and great cascades of waves, such as I saw in the end. (p. 61)

by its mysterious pulsations:

But what seemed perhaps the most strange to me of all, was a certain wonderful rising and falling of the sea; I do not mean the waves themselves, but a sort of wide heaving and swelling and sinking all over the ocean. It was something I can not very well describe; but I know very well what it was, and how it affected me. It made me almost dizzy to look at; and yet I could not keep my eyes off it, it seemed so passing strange and wonderful. (p. 62)

and by its vitality and energy:

Yes! yes! give me this glorious ocean life, this salt-sea life, this briny, foamy life, when the sea neighs and snorts, and you breathe the very breath that the great whales respire! Let me roll around the globe, let me rock upon the sea; let me race and pant out my life, with an eternal breeze astern, and an endless sea before! (p. 64)

Is it possible that the boy had left the bosom of one mother only to find another in what he was to call later "the muffled rollings of a milky sea"?<sup>32</sup> "The maternal significance of water," says Jung, "is one of the clearest interpretations of symbols in the whole field of mythology,"<sup>33</sup> and again,

The phonetic connection between G. Mar, F. mère, and the various words for 'sea' (Lat. mare, G. Meer, F. mer) is



certainly remarkable, though etymologically accidental. May it perhaps point back to the great primordial image of the mother who was once our only world and later became the symbol of the whole world?<sup>34</sup>

That this is no idle supposition will become apparent in our investigation of the most mature work, Moby Dick.

It is perhaps worth drawing the reader's attention also to another hint, in the passages from Redburn quoted above, that Melville was projecting the mother-imago onto the sea. He speaks of the sea as neighing and snorting. Horses, one of Melville's favourite images, appear in some form in nearly every novel. In Redburn he speaks of "a special halo about a horse" (p. 190), and describes a tornado as "a troop of wild horses before the flaming rush of a burning prairie" (p. 97). The significance of this imagery in our study is that in the symbolism of dreams and myths the horse is a 'libido-symbol':

the libido directed towards the mother actually symbolizes her as a horse. The mother-imago is a libido-symbol and so is the horse; at some points the meaning of the two symbols overlaps. But the factor common to both is the libido.<sup>35</sup>

The passage from Redburn we quoted above is surely a classic example of this over-lapping.

However important the sea as a maternal symbol it could not offer much human comfort to a lonely nineteen-year-old boy suffering from nostalgia for the lost mother. His need for affection and sympathy would inevitably lead him into a quest for human mother-substitutes. It has become a psychological platitude to say that all men are looking for their mothers in their associations with women. The difference in Melville's case was that he conducted his search among men. This is not to suggest that he was overtly homosexual, an assumption for which there is no concrete evidence. Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that the closest and most meaningful human relationships of both his own life and that of his heroes was with men--Harry in Redburn, Jack Chase in White-Jacket, Toby Greene in Typee, and Queequeg in Moby Dick--most of whom had originals in his own experience. His famous friendship with Hawthorne, furthermore, had an intensity on his side which does not seem to have been reciprocated



by Hawthorne.

Whence come you, Hawthorne? By what right do you drink from my flagon of life? And when I put it to my lips-- lo, they are yours and not mine. I feel that the Godhead is broken up like the bread at the Supper, and that we are the pieces.<sup>36</sup>

His need for male companionship may have sprung from his ambiguous attitude to women. Throughout the novels woman is kept at a safe and chaste distance. Either she is a queen for whom one throws one's coat over a puddle (Redburn, p. 105), or she is a safely-married, buxom matron like Mrs. Jones, who eases the young man's pangs of homesickness with nourishment (p. 21). Indeed, that woman is often thought of as merely a source of physical nourishment can hardly escape notice. In the novel under discussion alone there are a number of examples. Handsome Mary at the Sign of the Clipper in Liverpool "poured me out a brimmer of tea, in which for the time, I drowned all my melancholy (p. 154), and all Redburn gets or seems to want from "the three adorable charmers" he comes upon in a country ramble outside Liverpool is "a bowl of bubbling milk" (p. 205)!

Why Melville kept woman at a distance in the world of his artistic imagination is a mystery it would take a professional psychiatrist to unravel, but one is tempted to conjecture that it bore some relationship to the disillusionment of his actual experiences with women. We have already dealt with his relationship with his mother; his relationship with his wife, while by conventional standards a solid and satisfactory one, did not provide him with the ideal fulfillment for which he yearned, if we can rely on clues in the novels written after his marriage. One of the themes of Mardi, written while he was on his honeymoon, is the enigmatic disappearance of ideal love, and in Pierre when he had been married for five years and become the father of three children, he speaks of "the disenchanting glasses of the matrimonial days and nights" (p. 20). Mumford offers the following explanation for the disillusionment:

Sex meant marriage; marriage meant a household and a tired wife and children and debts. No wonder he retreated; no wonder his fantasy attached him to a mother who could not surrender, to a half-sister who could not bear children! . . . he did not carry over into his thought and his work



the experiences of a husband and a father and a happy lover. He does not speak about these experiences as a mature man; he speaks as an adolescent.<sup>37</sup>

Newton Arvin theorizes in the same vein but goes deeper:

the masculine and the feminine elements in Melville's own nature were far too precariously balanced, far too unreconciled with one another, for marriage to be anything but excruciatingly problematic both for him and for his wife. . . . he saw, and refused to see, that his own malady had its roots, or some of them, in his unhappily intense relations with his own mother.<sup>38</sup>

Whatever the explanation, men are the important erotic objects in Melville's novels, and Redburn is a good example. Young Wellingborough forms three attachments, two of which are only of minor importance but interesting from the point of view of this study: When the boy has his first bout of sea-sickness the one person who takes pity on him is a Greenlander with

a very white skin. . . blue eyes. . . and plenty of curly flaxen hair. . . . He was dressed very tastefully, too, as if he knew he was a good-looking fellow. He had on a new blue woolen Havre frock, with a new silk handkerchief round his neck, . . . a tarpaulin hat . . . with a long black ribbon streaming behind. . . gold anchors in his ears, and a silver ring on one of his fingers. . . .  
(p. 38-39)

This was the character who cheered, encouraged, and nursed the boy at a time when he was direly in need of human tenderness.

Carlo, the Italian boy, one of the emigrant passengers on the ship, offers an even better example of a male described in erotically feminine terms:

He was not above fifteen years of age; but in the twi-light pensiveness of his full morning eyes, there seemed to sleep experiences so sad and various, that his days must have seemed to him years . . . . The head was if any thing small; and heaped with thick clusters of tendril curls, half overhanging the brows and delicate ears, it somehow reminded you of a classic vase, piled up with Falernian foliage.

From the knee downward, the naked leg was beautiful to behold as any lady's arm; so soft and rounded, with infantile ease and grace. His whole figure was free, fine, and indolent; he was such a boy as might have ripened into life in a Neapolitan vineyard; such a boy as gipsies steal



in infancy; such a boy as Murillo often painted, when he went among the poor and outcast, for subjects where-with to captivate the eyes of rank and wealth; such a boy, as only Andalusian beggars are, full of poetry, gushing from every rent. (p. 238-239)

With the exception of Mrs. Glendinning, the hero's mother in Pierre, there is not a single description of woman in any of Melville's novels to match this.

The most important homo-erotic relationship in Redburn, however, is that between the hero and Harry Bolton, "a handsome, accomplished, but unfortunate youth" (p. 267), who is introduced, perhaps significantly, in the chapter immediately following the one describing his encounter with the "ravishing charmers" on whose account the narrator proclaims, "to this day I live a bachelor" (p. 207). Like the Italian boy, Carlo, Harry is described in feminine terms:

He was one of those small but perfectly formed beings, with curling hair, and silken muscles, who seem to have been born in cocoons. His complexion was a mantling brunette, feminine as a girl's; his feet were small; his hands were white; and his eyes were large, black and womanly; and, poetry aside, his voice was as the sound of harp. (p. 208)

The metaphors the narrator uses at several points later in the book in describing Harry contain imagery whose significance we have already discussed. His hand is "as white as the queen's cambric handkerchief" (p. 270); "among the droves of mixed beings and centaurs, [he] shows like a zebra, banding with elks" (p. 244). (The zebra, we remind the reader, is a kind of horse.)

There is still another important image associated with Harry, and one which we will meet again in Pierre, the image of the city. First of all, Harry is city-bred, and Bury St. Edmunds, of which he is a native, is personified:

In vain did Bury, with all its fine old monastic attractions, lure him to abide on the beautiful banks of her Larke, and under the shadow of her stately and storied old Saxon tower. By all my rare old historic associations, breathed Bury. . . do not, oh Harry! abandon me. (p. 209)

But Harry does abandon her, his first mother city, for a more exciting one, London, to which he also lures his companion, Redburn. Melville's attitude to cities in both the passages describing Liverpool and those



describing the experiences of the two young adventurers in London, shows a markedly close resemblance to the archetypal attitude to cities found in myth. In the chapter, "Symbols of the Mother and of Rebirth" in Symbols of Transformation, Jung devotes several pages to a discussion of the city as "a maternal symbol,"<sup>39</sup> citing passages from Forbenius, the Old Testament, Revelations, and the Apocalypse to illustrate. Like Melville's Liverpool, the city in these examples represents that aspect of the mother which repulses the son: "This mother is not only the mother of all abominations, but the receptacle of all that is wicked and unclean."<sup>40</sup> Both Liverpool, where Redburn meets Harry, and London to which he is carried off by Harry, are such receptacles: Liverpool is a place of poverty, suffering disease, corruption, where a woman "With eyes, and lips, and ears like any queen" (p. 124) dies a foul death of starvation; London is a place of pleasure-seeking and corrupt morals, of which the young man's last impression is pervaded with the smell of stale roses and decaying cigars (p. 229). It is significant, too, that the fifty-year-old guide-book to Liverpool which had belonged to Redburn's father is quite useless to the son in his attempt to understand a side of life of which the paternal elements in his world had kept him innocent.

Toward his prodigal, city-bred companion of the Dionysian spirit, Harry Bolton, who can sing "like Orpheus among the charmed leopards and tigers," (p. 267) Redburn remains to the end loyal and faithful. He "ever cherished toward Harry a heart, loving and true" (p. 215), for Harry represents an aspect of existence which held a powerful attraction for a strictly brought up New England youth.



### CHAPTER III

#### THE QUEST FOR THE MOTHER

Of the five novels Melville wrote before Moby Dick four are overtly autobiographical, and constitute a fairly complete and authentic record of the outward events of Melville's life between the years 1837, when he first went to sea, and the year 1844, when he returned from the sea to settle as a writer in New York. Redburn, as we have seen, is a record of his first voyage. On January 3, 1841, he shipped on the whaling ship Acushnet for the Marquesas, where he jumped ship and spent several weeks with a tribe of Polynesian cannibals known as the Taipis. This experience he recorded in Typee, published in 1846. Omoo, published a year later, is an account of his third voyage, to Tahiti in an Australian whaler, and White-Jacket (1850), an account of his cruise around Cape Horn on the U.S. frigate United States.

It is a misconception, however, to regard the novels simply as journalistic accounts of actual experience. It is obvious that even in his first novel he was primarily interested in 'experience' only as source material for the development of certain themes in which he remained interested throughout his writing career. The four autobiographical novels might be said, indeed, to form a quartet in which there is one central and continuously developing theme: the struggle to achieve manhood. Of more importance than the record of outward events described in these novels is the lower layer portraying the autobiography of a soul aware of its own growth. "I am like one of those seeds taken out of the Egyptian Pyramids," Melville wrote to Hawthorne, "which, after being three thousand years a seed and nothing but a seed, being planted in English soil, it developed itself, grew to greenness and then fell to mould,"<sup>1</sup> and in a later letter, "Lord when shall we be done growing?"<sup>2</sup> It is this growth of his own separate and autonomous identity with which he was most pre-occupied. All of his heroes--one might say all of his villains as well--are projections of Melville at some stage in his development.

Long before Moby Dick, Melville was finding in the raw material of his own experience appropriate symbols in which to present his favourite theme. Indeed, he must, as Richard Chase insists, have had "his character-



istic symbols before he ever set pen to paper."<sup>3</sup> This is not to say that he necessarily set out at the beginning of his career to write a symbolic novel, only that he was groping from the beginning for a way to articulate "the linked analogies" between "nature" and the "soul of man" (Moby Dick, p. 309).

The three autobiographical novels which remain to be considered in this chapter, then, can be regarded as comprising a record of progressive stages in Melville's development as a man and as an artist. What we shall discover is that each novel forms part of a coherent symbolic pattern which was to reach its final unity and culmination in Moby Dick. It is a pattern characterized predominantly by a journey between polar opposites. The wandering hero can never find a satisfactory destination because upon reaching one of the polarities he becomes a victim of a longing for the other. The further he goes in one direction either to escape something behind him or to seek something ahead of him the more inevitable his return to the point whence he started. It is the archetypal pattern of "the Eternal Return" symbolized in Melville by the image of the circle:

Round the world! There is much in that sound to inspire proud feelings; but whereto does all that circumnavigation conduct? Only through numberless perils to the very point whence we started, where those that we left behind secure, were all the time before us. (Moby Dick, p. 234)

The questing hero achieves manhood only insofar as he succeeds in reconciling and holding in balance the polar extremities within himself. As long as he renounces one and gives himself up wholly to the other, either the fruitless quest continues, as in Taji's case, or he destroys himself, as do Ahab and Pierre.

As we have already explained in the introduction, one can call these polar extremities the maternal and paternal principles. In all of Melville's early heroes, the problem of growth is primarily that of finding the mother, the source of nourishment necessary for growth, which an apparently paternal universe has hidden from the orphan hero, and of re-establishing the prematurely broken connection with her, without renouncing the father, submitting wholly to power of the mother-imago and becoming consequently paralysed by the impotency of childhood. Absolute submission to the mother is tantamount to spiritual castration. The hero's progressive



struggle with this problem can be traced through Typee, Omoo and White-Jacket.

In Redburn we saw the orphan deprived of his mother and abandoned in a cruelly paternal world, a world often symbolized in the novels by the ship: "We mortals are all on board a fast-sailing, never-sinking world frigate. . ." (White-Jacket, p. 372). The ship represents organized society, the hierarchy of authority, the discipline of law, tradition, precedent. In short it symbolizes one of the polar extremities with which the maturing hero must come to terms. But deprived of the spiritual nourishment of the maternal principles of security and close human contact, the orphan hero is especially sensitive to the cruelty and abuse of the paternal, authoritative social systems in which each man "lords it over those below him, while larded over himself by his superiors" (White-Jacket, p. 208). Behind Melville's exposé of the abuses of capitalism, imperialism and militarism, one senses a powerful subjective intensity which cannot be explained on the grounds of humanitarian concern alone.

In hatred the hero of Typee renounces his father and goes in search of the mother: he jumps ship with a comrade at Marquesan island known to be inhabited by two tribes of primitives, one, the Happars, enjoying a reputation for gentleness and humanity and the other the Typees, a tribe of savage cannibals. The intention of the narrator and his comrade is to visit the Happars in the hope of being received kindly and allowed to sojourn among them but they descend by mistake into the Typee valley where, nevertheless, they are welcomed with enthusiastic kindness.

There are reasons for venturing a theory that the narrator's visit to the valley of the Typees symbolizes a journey of the psyche into the dark instinctual realm of the mother-imago. First, the physical characteristics of the terrain over which the travellers journey in their descent into the abode of the primitives, and the valley itself, are described in archetypal imagery suggesting the mother. The significance of the image of descent from the realm of light and space toward the centre of the earth to a place of confinement and darkness is discussed by both Jung<sup>4</sup> and Eliade;<sup>5</sup> and Robert Shulman in an article in American Literature entitled "The Serious Functions of Melville's Phallic Jokes" reminds us



that "The descent into the valley, often connoting the womb in particular and the feminine in general, is one of Melville's recurring symbols."<sup>6</sup> The language, furthermore, in which Melville describes topographical detail is unmistakable:

The sight that now greeted us was one that will ever be vividly impressed upon my mind. Five foaming streams, rushing through as many gorges, and swelled and turbid by the recent rains, united together in one mad plunge of nearly eighty feet, and fell with wild uproar into a deep black pool scooped out of the gloomy looking rocks that lay piled around, and thence in one collected body dashed down a narrow sloping channel which seemed to penetrate into the very bowels of the earth. . . . It was now sunset, and the feeble uncertain light that found its way into these caverns and woody depths heightened their strange appearance, and reminded us that in a short time we should find ourselves in utter darkness. (p. 69)

Later, the narrator speaks of reaching "the bosom of the valley" (p. 89), a phrase suggesting precisely what the valley was to be for him--the passive, inert, maternal abode where the enclosing arms of the mother would protect him from the threat of the paternal world. Fire, the symbol of male potency, and psychic energy,<sup>7</sup> we remind the reader, is not kept alive in the valley, and when it is needed is kindled only with the greatest difficulty (p. 142).

A second reason for associating the Typee Valley with the mother-imago is suggested to us by Fiedler's theory that "the coloured man", or "the dark-skinned native" has come to represent for the American writer the "forbidden erotic object,"<sup>8</sup> with whom union constitutes a rebellion against society and its restrictions, a desire for re-submergence in the unconscious, primordial, impulsive side of the psyche, from which the individual is separated by what Jung calls a "discerning, evaluating, selecting, discriminating consciousness."<sup>9</sup> As we have already explained at length, the area of the unconscious is archetypally represented by the mother, and that of the conscious by the father.

Whether or not the sojourn with the olive-skinned primitives of Typee valley is a symbolic return to the mother, it is surely obvious that it is symbolic regression to childhood, to that original paradisal state



in which one receives all the sensual blessings of life passively and without effort. The islanders live a life of perpetual pleasure and gaiety, eating, dancing, swimming, and most of all, sleeping. "To many of them, indeed, life is little else than an often interrupted and luxurious nap" (p. 187). To these "gardens of Paradise" (p. 73) the narrator and his comrade are welcomed like honoured guests. They are served sumptuous feasts, they sleep when they want to, they are attended by voluptuous Marquesan girls. Typee is indeed the archetypal paradise, the lost world of childhood.

This world is cradled in the lap of an indolent and passive kind of eroticism which Richard Chase ventures to call "infantile sexuality."<sup>10</sup> The narrator's first encounter with the Typees upon entering the valley is with

A boy and a girl, slender and graceful, and completely naked. . . . An arm of the boy, half screened from sight by her wild tresses, was thrown about the neck of the girl, while with the other he held one of her hands in his.

The Marquesan girls have "an abandoned voluptuousness in their character" which the narrator dare not "attempt to describe" (pp. 74-75). The sensuous tone of all the descriptions--of the people, their abode, and their activities--suggests, although a Victorian novelist cannot say so outright, that the natives spent much<sup>\*</sup> of their time engaged in a kind of leisurely erotic play. It is this eroticism which Chase calls "the chief enticement of the valley and which he says "gives its character to the whole experience."

The hero, however, in spite of the devotion of the beautiful Fayaway, sinks comfortably into the sensuous atmosphere without, the reader is made pretty certain, actively involving himself in any kind of adult erotic relationship. He and Fayaway are like infant siblings: they play together in a pool or lounge for hours in a canoe. The hero is protected from having to assume the role of an adult male in his relationship with Fayaway by a "mysterious disease" (p. 149) in his leg, which he first became aware of as he descended into the valley and which he suspected was the bite of "some venomous reptile, congenial inhabitant of the chasm from which we had lately emerged" (p. 72). Throughout his stay



in the valley the hero continues to "languish under a complaint the origin and nature of which [remain] a mystery" (p. 134) and which "nearly unmans" (p. 273) him.

As a result of this malady he cannot look after his own basic needs, and has to be cared for, like a child, by his "tried servitor and faithful valet Kory-Kory" (p. 109), who carries him about, feeds him "as if [he] were an infant" (p. 116) and bathes him, regarding him all the while as a "froward inexperienced child" (p. 117). (The phrase "froward child" is used several times.) Again, when his ailment is being treated by the witch doctor, he is held down "upon the same principle which prompts an affectionate mother to hold a struggling child in a dentist's chair" (p. 106).

Paralysed by his infantile impotence the hero begins to have frightening forebodings that he is in grave danger. He begins to suspect that he is not a guest but a prisoner, that the gentle and indulgent beings who coddle and worship him embody some kind of threat. They will not allow him out of their sight and he begins to recall the tales about their cannibalism. On the literal level his life is at stake, but on the symbolic level it is his manhood that is threatened. If he was "nearly unmanned" by the disease which made independent action in the valley impossible, the unmanning might be completed if he were to stay in the valley. "He feared cannibalism in general," says Chase, "but specifically he feared castration. This was the real content of the nameless foreboding which he felt when he descended into Typee Valley and when he was about to escape."<sup>12</sup> Curiously, Chase does not carry his argument to its next step and explain from whom the threat of castration comes: the greatest threat to the achievement of manhood is the mother, who wants to unman her son and keep him for herself, to prohibit the inevitable separation, to draw him back to union with her, to the symbolic act of incest whose consequence is spiritual death. She is the source of the nameless foreboding felt by the mythical hero of Typee. He found the lost mother for whom he longed but having found her he takes the first step toward spiritual maturity: he recognizes her as a threat. He sees that however desirable she may be, to submit to her would be death. He has to escape her by a violent assertion of will and get back to the paternal ship. On another level of interpretation,



however favourable a comparison Melville may make of primitive peoples in opposition to civilized man, civilized man, he is saying, cannot return to his archaic beginnings; he must not only accept the degree of consciousness he has gained but go beyond it. Explaining why primitivism cannot be a satisfactory Utopia for modern man Briffault says in The Mothers:

We are prone to jump to the conclusion that uncultured man managed these things better, and that the panacea for the evils that beset civilization is a return to simpler conditions. . . . But to men and women whose soul is the product of an evolution that has transcended the conditions of primal instincts and primitive irrationality, these would for the most part be intolerable and revolting.<sup>13</sup>

This is an understatement. A return to "simpler conditions" would not only be intolerable and revolting," but would, as Melville sees, result in the spiritual death of both the individual and western society.

The Valley of the Typees is only one of the two major "mother-analogies" or "anima-projections" we find in the early novels; the other, the male erotic object, because less overtly a projection of the mother-imago, is more tenacious. We have already discussed the hero's relationship with Harry Bolton in Redburn, the first of a series of such relationships which persist, with varying degrees of intensity, throughout the record of Melville's spiritual development. Each of the early novels offers at least one example of what Fiedler in Love and Death in the American Novel refers to as the "anti-bride,"<sup>14</sup> a term by which he means to suggest the homo-erotic rebellion of the American male against the sexual restrictions imposed upon society by women and the institution of marriage. Since woman holds herself at a socially approved distance, the only alternative for man is to turn to males for human contact. We mention Fiedler's theory because in placing Melville in the tradition of the American male's flight from petticoat rule, he reinforces our argument that the erotic ambiguity in Melville's work is significant not as a personal and unique psychological aberration, but as a more widespread, perhaps even universal problem.

Fiedler is, of course, by no means the first to notice this aspect



of Melville. Chase and Arvin in particular have been specific in their treatment of it. Arvin speaks of Melville's "obscure sense of the conflict between comradeship and romantic love,"<sup>15</sup> a conflict the result of which is that "he is always at his easiest and most unconstrained when he can leave the land and the world of women quite behind him and launch himself upon the high seas in the midst of men and boys exclusively."<sup>16</sup> Richard Chase is more bold in his implication of latent homosexuality in Melville:

As has often been said, there are no real women in his books . . . . Always in Melville's writings the female body--that Tartarus of Maids--revives some primitive fear, some dark ambiguous awe, some sick revulsion, some guilty, stonelike paralysis; . . . . Female beauty--tender,<sup>17</sup> erotic, and joy-giving--he could see only in men.

Toby Greene, the comrade with whom the narrator jumps ship in Typee, provides a good illustration. The same kind of eroticism we met in Harry Bolton characterizes the description of Toby:

There was much even in the appearance of Toby calculated to draw me towards him, for while the greater part of the crew were as coarse in person as in mind, Toby was endowed with a remarkably prepossessing exterior. Arrayed in his blue frock and duck trowsers, he was as smart a looking sailor as ever stepped upon a deck; he was singularly small and slightly made, with great flexibility of limb. His naturally dark complexion had been deepened by exposure to the tropical sun, and a mass of jetty locks clustered about his temples, and threw a darker shade into his large black eyes. He was a strange wayward being, moody, fitful, and melancholy--at times almost morose. He had a quick and fiery temper too, which, when thoroughly roused, transported him into a state bordering on delirium. (p. 53).

Having discovered that Toby shares his "cordial detestation of the ship," (p. 54) and wanting a comrade with whom to divide the dangers and alleviate the hardships of the adventure he proposes, the narrator reveals his plan to Toby and the two arrive at a "mutual understanding" which is ratified "with an affectionate wedding [italics mine] of palms" (p. 54).

Chronologically, Toby Greene of Typee represents the second of Melville's attachments and already there is a noticeable lessening of erotic intensity compared to the relationship with Harry Bolton. The friendship with Toby has more of the air of innocent comrades sharing an



adventure and the less that of seduction into forbidden realms which characterized the relationship with Harry. In Omoo this decrease progresses one step further in the relationship with the Long Doctor, who is markedly more virile than the previous two friends:

His personal appearance was remarkable. He was over six feet high--a tower of bones, with a complexion absolutely colourless, fair hair, and a light, unscrupulous grey eye, twinkling occasionally with the very devil of mischief. Among the crew, he went by the name of the Long Doctor, or, more frequently still, Doctor Long Ghost. And from whatever high estate Doctor Long Ghost might have fallen, he had certainly at some time or other spent money, drank Burgundy, and associated with gentlemen. (pp 26-27)

While the break from the mother analogy represented by the Typee Valley was violent and abrupt, that from the mother projected as the male erotic object is a gradual progression that parallels the writer's psychological growth.

The preference for males may explain the ineffectiveness of Melville's women. In Typee he makes a concession to romantic convention in introducing Fayaway into the narrative, but one feels that Melville does not really believe in her, for she is described in the most worn of romantic cliches.

The face of this girl was a rounded oval, and each feature as perfectly formed as the heart or imagination of man could desire. . . . teeth of a dazzling whiteness. . . . rosy mouth. . . . natural ringlets. . . . blue eyes. . . . The hands of Fayaway were as soft and delicate as those of any countess. . . . Her feet, though wholly exposed, were as diminutive and fairly shaped as those which peep from beneath the skirts of a Lima lady's dress. (p. 113)

Perhaps recognizing his failure to create a convincing image of a woman, he retreats from the attempt, confessing that Fayaway's general loveliness was so overwhelming that he will not try to describe it. In fact, he will not attempt to describe Fayaway because he is not really interested in her. She is hardly an erotic object at all; she is more a tender and compassionate sister who shows great sympathy for Tommo's predicament. The hero reposes "full confidence in her candor and intelligence" (p. 138). A curious emotion for a robust young American to feel toward a voluptuous Polynesian girl! We must remember, of course, that he is "lame," and



therefore protected from the necessity of having to assert his manliness with Fayaway.

In Omoo women become even more remote. Here Melville uses various ingenious devices to protect himself from intimacy with women even in his imagination. One is to speak of women in the plural and show them in large groups, perhaps on the well-worn theory that there is safety in numbers. The reference to the women of the Tahitian hamlet of Loohoooloo--"the young ladies, in particular, being extremely sociable" (p. 261)--is characteristic of references to native women in Omoo. When an individual woman is introduced into the narrative, she is not allowed to stay long enough to warrant the development of an intimacy with her. Mrs. Bell, for example, "a beautiful young English-woman, charmingly dressed, and mounted upon a spirited little white pony," (p. 288) appears only long enough to produce "wonderfully piqued" curiosity in the hero, and then disappears immediately at the end of the same chapter in which she appeared, never to be seen again.

If the woman in question happens to be a Queen, her social position acts as the safeguard. And if one makes her middle-aged, not very attractive, and something of a comic figure, as in the case of Pomaree Vahinee I, Queen of Tahiti, one is even safer:

She wore a loose gown of blue silk, with two rich shawls, one red and the other yellow, tied about her neck. Her royal majesty was barefooted.

She was about the ordinary size, rather matronly; her features not very handsome; her mouth, voluptuous; but there was a careworn expression in her face, probably attributable to her late misfortunes. From her appearance, one would judge her about forty; . . . (p. 303)

Significantly, the hero and his comrade are dismissed from the royal presence without being allowed to speak even a word to her and are not again admitted "within the palace precincts" (p. 304).

White-Jacket, the last novel in the autobiographical quartet, marks a decisive stage in the process of Melville's initiation into manhood. Having recognized the mother imago as a threat to his spiritual autonomy, he can now return to the paternal ship and set about the task of reconciling himself with the principles it represents, while fearlessly denouncing the



abuse of those principles. The new-found maturity is evident in the relative degree of contentment, even joy, with which he approaches life in spite of the inhuman treatment he and his comrades receive at the hands of their superiors:

Oh, give me again the rover's life--the joy, the thrill,  
the whirl! Let me feel thee again, old sea! let me  
leap into thy saddle once more. (p. 76)

and the sea is once more a "blue, boundless, dimpled, laughing, sunny sea" (p. 48).

The growing maturity which provided him with the courage to renounce the power of the mother over him also gives him now the courage to denounce the cruelty and harshness of the feared father. While the hardship of life at sea was evident enough in Redburn, it was endured with only passive complaining. The naval abuses which Melville encountered on a man-of-war, however, aroused him to such a vehement indictment that its reverberations were felt throughout America. His case against the Navy was backed by the American Press, and according to the memoirs of Rear Admiral Franklin who had been a shipmate of Melville's, "had more influence in abolishing corporal punishment than anything else."<sup>18</sup> Certainly Melville does not mince words:

The immutable ceremonies and iron etiquette of a man-of-war; the spiked barriers separating the various grades of rank; the delegated absolutism of authority on all hands; the impossibility, on the part of the common seaman, of appeal from incidental abuses, and many more things that might be enumerated, all tend to beget in most armed ships a general social condition which is the precise reverse of what any Christian could desire. (p. 351)

Melville is careful, furthermore, to include in the novel occasion for a reading of the "Articles of War" in which thirteen of the twenty offences listed were punishable by death. With justifiably bitter sarcasm he speaks of

the pure, bubbling mild of human kindness, and Christian charity, and forgiveness of injuries which pervade this charming document, so thoroughly imbued, as a Christian code, with the benignant spirit of the Sermon on the Mount.

A third indication in White-Jacket of the new maturity is the greater health and wholeness of his relationship with his fellow human beings,



in whom he no longer feels so intensely the need to look for mother analogies. While Chase is right no doubt in seeing the white jacket as a mark of the wearer's alienation from the rest of the crew,<sup>19</sup> the hero of White-Jacket is a far different person from the genteel, somewhat snobbish, young sailor of Redburn who expected to be invited to the Captain's cabin. Although he says,

I used to hold myself somewhat aloof from the mass of seamen on board the Neversink. . . my real acquaintances were comparatively few, and my intimates still fewer. . . .  
(p. 164)

the important thing to notice is that the number of intimates has increased over the other novels, in each of which his relationship with one other close friend had an exclusiveness akin to that of erotic love. In addition to the memorable Jack Chase, Melville's admiration for whom Weaver calls "the happiest wholehearted surrender he ever gave to any human being,"<sup>20</sup> there were three other intimates with whom he "unreservedly consorted:" (p. 51) Lemsford, the poet, Nord, "a reader of good books" (p. 52), and Williams, "a laughing philosopher" (p. 52). Indeed the richness and depth of his friendships partly accounts for Melville's relative happiness and contentment amidst "the martial formalities and thousand vices" (p. 76) of a man-of-war.

The most important by far of these friendships was that with Jack Chase, captain of the maintop and modelled on the actual John J. Chase, whom he had known on the United States and to whom he dedicated Billy Budd. In calling the hero's relationship with Jack Chase a "homosexual romance"<sup>21</sup> Fiedler misses part of significance. It is the first important relationship with a completely masculine, whole and healthy human being. Free from any erotic taint, it is the relationship of son and father or brother and brother, and therefore marks the new-found freedom in the maturing hero from the power of the mother-imago. Melville's enthusiastic description of his "sire" reveals the admiration, respect and affection he felt for him:

He was a Briton, and a true-blue; tall and well-knit, with a clear open eye, a fine broad brow, and an abounding nut-brown beard. No man ever had a better heart of a bolder. He was loved by the seamen and admired by the officers; and even when the Captain spoke of him it was with a



slight air of respect. Jack was a frank and charming man.

No one could be better company in forecastle or saloon; no man told such stories, sang such songs or with greater alacrity sprang to his duty. . . .

There was such an abounding air of good sense and good feeling about the man, that he who could not love him, would thereby pronounce himself a knave. I thanked my sweet stars that kind fortune had placed me near him, though under him, in the frigate; and from the outset Jack and I were fast friends. (p. 16)

Jack's courage and virility are demonstrated throughout the novel, in his fearless and diplomatic request to the Commodore for permission for the sailors to go ashore at Rio di Janeiro, in his daring intercession on White-Jacket's behalf when he is unjustly accused of a crime punishable by flogging, in his desertion of the ship to fight for the liberty of Peru. In the imagination of his admirer he is magnified to heroic proportions; "he was better than a hundred common mortals. . . . a whole phalanx, and entire army" (p. 17). While Melville's attitude to Chase contains a large element of hero-worship, it is considerably more mature than his earlier relationships.

The most important indication of the hero's manhood in White-Jacket, however, is his recognition of his own immaturity, symbolized by the white jacket. Indeed this recognition is the most important step in the initiation into manhood, for the immaturity must be consciously recognized before it can be shed. The symbolism of the jacket, of "the mishaps and inconveniences, troubles, and tribulation of all sorts brought upon him by that unfortunate but indispensable garment" (p. 366), and of the hero's struggle to rid himself of it give the novel its unity. Its whiteness, that symbolic colour that has such an important place in Melville's imagination, has, as in the later novels, an ambiguous meaning. "An outlandish garment of [his] own devising" (p. 7), the jacket is made to protect its wearer from the elements and serve as a storehouse for his possessions (p. 38), but the trouble caused the hero by its unfortunate colour outweighs its intended advantages: Instead of protecting him from the rain it proves to be "a universal absorber" (p. 8); because of its many pockets its wearer becomes the victim of pick-pockets (p. 39); its colour allows him to be easily spotted when there is work to be done (p. 116); but most



important, the whiteness of the jacket is a danger to his very life. On two occasions the jacket is responsible for an almost fatal fall from aloft. After the first mishap White-Jacket tries to disguise its colour by soiling it or dying it (p. 77), or to get rid of it by a "swap" (p. 117) or by selling it at an auction (p. 191). But he is not successful in freeing himself from the infernal thing until he is brought by it to the brink of death. At the end of the book when he falls from the yardarm into the sea the weight of the jacket almost proves fatal:

I essayed to swim toward the ship; but instantly I was conscious of a feeling like being pinioned in a feather-bed, and, moving my hands, felt my jacket puffed out above my tight girdle with water. I strove to tear it off; but it was looped together here and there, and the strings were not then to be sundered by hand. I whipped out my knife, that was tucked at my belt, and ripped my jacket straight up and down, as if I were ripping open myself. With a violent struggle I then burst out of it, and was free. Heavily soaked, it slowly sank before my eyes. (p. 369)

The ambiguous value of the white garment seems to represent--as whiteness does more overtly in later novels--the ambiguous value of Innocence, which for Melville is synonymous with moral immaturity, with the adolescent attitude of one who believes in the existence of absolute principles of morality, with the state of unconsciousness from which the psyche has not yet been awakened by experience to the awareness of the ambiguities and paradoxes in reality. Moral growth, Melville, is saying, is a process of perpetual rebirth from unconsciousness to the light of consciousness. Unconsciousness itself is a relative rather than an absolute value ("It was not a very white jacket, but white enough" p. 71), and therefore can never be shed absolutely but only in progressive stages. That is why the author-hero is symbolically reborn (as at the end of Moby Dick) several times in the novels and why the images of immersion and rebirth recur repeatedly.

The fall from the yardarm and the loss of the jacket together symbolize a turning point in Melville's spiritual life. It is surely no coincidence that the year in which the experiences described in this novel occurred is also the year from which Melville said in a letter to



Hawthorne, he dated his life.<sup>22</sup> It is the year that marks the true beginning of Melville's manhood, the year in which he experienced rebirth, longing for which is the theme of the ancient myths. The language in which he describes the fall into the sea is pervaded with symbolic intent: "The life-and-death poise soon passed; and then I found myself slowly ascending, and caught a dim glimmering of light" (p. 368). The symbolic significance of immersion in water hardly needs comment, but we remind the reader of the connection that has been established by Jung and his school between baptismal water, the amniotic fluids of the mother's womb, and the unconscious, a connection which leads Jung to the theory that the unconscious is "the mother or matrix of consciousness," in other words, consciousness is born from and nourished by the life-giving forces of the unconscious. When it is deprived of this nourishment it can only be revitalized by another birth, by a second emersion in the regenerating fluids of the mother. In our discussion of Typee we saw that Melville as a first step to manhood freed himself by a violent assertion of conscious will from the instinctual power of the mother-imago. The second step was to acknowledge the need for her nourishment without sacrificing his spiritual autonomy. The fall from the yardarm into the life-giving sea symbolizes this acknowledgment. The "life-and-death poise" of which the author speaks is that precarious balance between the unconscious and conscious, between instinct and will, between the maternal and the paternal which is necessary for productive life. Having achieved this balance Melville was now ready for his mature work.



## CHAPTER IV

### MARDI: THE TWO FACES OF THE MOTHER

Mardi, standing chronologically between the Polynesian novels, Typee and Omoo, and the sea-faring novels, Redburn and White-Jacket, represents an abortive attempt on the part of its author to give overt and deliberate symbolic expression to the paradoxes he encountered in the process of psychic development that we have traced through the autobiographical novels. In his own personal spiritual problems he found the themes for his great symbolic writing. Nevertheless, too close an identification of the author with his heroes in the three symbolic novels we are about to consider--Mardi, Moby Dick and Pierre--can be misleading, for the mature Melville surpasses in moral wisdom the characters he creates. They portray extremes of annihilating tendencies Melville had become aware of in his own being but whose ultimate conclusion he managed to avoid. As Richard Chase insists, "autobiography ends short of an identification of the author with Taji or Ahab or Pierre. These are beings whom Melville, a larger man, has created."<sup>1</sup> A contrary view is expressed by G. C. Homans in an article in The New England Quarterly: He regards the three novels as three acts in Melville's spiritual life, and that "what is true of his characters must be taken as being true of himself."<sup>2</sup> Such an extreme view is surely a serious underestimation of Melville both as artist and human being, for the mature Melville, we repeat, is always wiser than his heroes.

In Mardi we find Melville clumsily groping his way toward a kind of writing that would be radically different from that which had won him his popularity as a writer. In spite of his success he must have sensed that he had not yet found his true element. In a letter to his London publisher John Murray during his composition of Mardi he expresses his distaste for "narrative of facts" and his intention to do something different:

My romance I assure you is not dish water nor its model borrowed from the Circulating Library. It is something new I assure you, & original if nothing more. But I can give you no adequate idea, of it. You must see it for yourself.--Only forbear to prejudge it.--It opens like a true narrative--like Omoo for Example, on ship board--& the romance & poetry of the thing thence grow continually, till it becomes a story wild enough I assure you & with a meaning too.<sup>3</sup>

Mardi is indeed a "wild enough" book and quite candidly an experimental one.



In it Melville is casting about for the genre and themes which would serve him best. In a single novel he tries his hand at symbolism, satire, romance, oriental myth, mysticism, humour, digression, travelogue, allegory. The critical reception of this curious conglomeration ranged from the view that it was "an undigested mass of rambling metaphysics"<sup>4</sup> to calling it "an infinite fund of wit, humour, pathos, and philosophy."<sup>5</sup>

The book can be divided into three quite distinct and easily discernible parts: first, a narrative of sea adventure in which the narrator jumps ship with a comrade, spends sixteen days in a whaling boat before encountering the Parki, a pearl-diving ship manned by a Polynesian and his wife, survives the sinking of the Parki and finds himself and his comrades once more in an open boat; second, a romantic allegory concerning Yillah, a beautiful Polynesian maiden of mysterious origins whom the narrator captures by violence from the canoe in which she is being carried to sacrifice by a priest and his sons, then the narrator's ecstatic happiness while he possesses her, his reception as a demi-god, Taji, on the island of Ode, Yillah's disappearance, and the narrator's attempts, while pursued by the avenging sons of the priest, and haunted by the Circean figure of Hautia and her hand-maidens, to recover his lost love; third, a travelogue-satire in which the narrator, in his quest for Yillah, journeys throughout Mardi visiting its various countries, which represent the nations of the real world and provide the author with an opportunity to satirize, in the manner of Swift, western civilization and its corrupt institutions.

It is the second of these parts, the tale of Yillah and Hautia, which concerns us here, for it is our contention that these two feminine figures in their relationship with the hero Taji, represent the opposing sides of what Jung calls, in Symbols of Transformation, "the dual mother." In his discussion of the "dual-mother motif" in myth, Jung explains that the hero is "he who stems from two mothers,"<sup>6</sup> the first, his earthly mother, and the second his heavenly mother. In its longing for wholeness, completion or realization of selfhood, the psyche seeks the second mother through whom it may experience rebirth and the discovery of its own divinity. This longing of the psyche is projected in myth as the hero, whose "first birth makes him a mortal man, the second an immortal half-god."<sup>7</sup>



The allegorical portion of Mardi offers abundant evidence that at its profoundest level it is a reworking of this mythical theme, that is, the longing of the psyche for the unconditional love of the mother, that perfect love compounded of flesh and spirit which the soul experiences once, briefly, in childhood and recovers only when it acknowledges its own divinity. The story of Taji is a tragic perversion of the myth: Taji finds the perfect love, but in refusing to acknowledge one of the sides of her dual nature, loses not only her but ultimately his own soul's "emperorship."

Of the three central symbolic figures in the myth, let us consider the meaning of Taji first. The imagery associated with him is that of divinity and royalty. His name itself, as Dorothee Finkelstein has discovered in her researches into Melville's use of oriental material, means in Arabic, "my crown"<sup>8</sup> and "Mardi" means "my world."<sup>9</sup> Combining this discovery with Jung's theory that "The archetype of the self has, functionally the significance of a ruler of the inner world,"<sup>10</sup> we are led inevitably to the conclusion that Melville's tale is a mythical projection of psychic processes. That the self that rules the inner world, furthermore, is, in Melville's view, as in the view expressed universally by mythmakers, of divine origin, is suggested by the legend of Taji's origin. He is believed to "come from the sun" (p. 137), the sun being "mythologically synonymous"<sup>11</sup> with God. The crown, furthermore, is associated in myth with both God and the sun.<sup>12</sup> Taji, then is a typical hero of myth, half divine and half mortal.

It is consistent with the mythical pattern outlined by Jung that Taji assumes his role of demi-god only after he has found Yillah, the symbol of ideal unconditional love, that is to say "the symbolical mother" who "is distinguished as being divine, supernatural, or in some way extraordinary."<sup>13</sup> Yillah's archetypal significance, as "the symbolical mother," or "anima-projection" is suggested in various ways. First of all, the hero's pretense to Yillah that they had known each other as children in Oroolia (named after Oro, the God of Mardi) suggests her association with childhood or pre-natal bliss:

Know you not my voice? Those little spirits in your eyes  
have seen me before. They mimic me now as they sport in  
their lakes. All the past a dim blank? Think of the  
time when we ran up and down in our arbour, where the



green vines grew over the great ribs of the stranded whale. Oh, Yillah, little Yillah! has it all come to this? am I for ever forgotten? Yet over the wide watery world have I sought thee: from isle to isle, from sea to sea. (p. 119)

Secondly her "divine," "supernatural," or "extraordinary" quality is emphasized throughout the references to her: "She declared herself more than mortal, a maiden from Oroolia" (p. 114). She lived in a dell called "Ardair," a name which Finkelstein interprets as "The Country of Air,"<sup>14</sup> air being a symbol traditionally associated with spirit as opposed to matter. Of her name, Miss Finkelstein says,

It is evident that in its Arabic connotation Yillah suggests the Mohammedan name of God, Allah, and in particular the invocation of faith 'La ilaha illa-llah'.<sup>15</sup>

Miss Finkelstein also shows the resemblance between Taji's quest for Yillah and the quest for the beloved in Arabian romance which represents the yearning for divine love.<sup>16</sup> This yearning is evident too in the echoes of the "Song of Songs" in Taji's expressions of adoration for Yillah: "Was not Yillah my shore and my grove, my meadow, my mead, my soft shady vine, and my arbour" (p. 120). In Taji's relationship with Yillah, especially in her effect on him, furthermore, there are frequent intimations of the supernatural:

But her wild beauty was a veil to the things still more strange. As often she gazed so earnestly into my eyes, like some pure spirit looking far down into my soul, and seeing therein some upturned faces, I stared in amaze, and asked what spell was on me that thus she gazed.

(p. 126)

and again

But day by day did her spell weave round me its magic, and all the hidden things of her being grew more lovely and strange. Did I commune with a spirit? Often I thought that Paradise had overtaken me on earth, and that Yillah was verily an angel, and hence the mysteries that hallowed her. (p. 160)

The imagery in which Yillah's physical appearance is described provides some important evidence for her significance as an archetype or "anima-projection":

Before me crouched a beautiful girl. Her hands were



drooping. And, like a saint from a shrine, she looked sadly out from her long, fair hair. A low wail issued from her lips, and she trembled like a sound. There were tears on her cheeks, and a rose-coloured pearl on her bosom.

Did I dream?--a snow-white skin: blue firmament eyes: Golconda locks. (p. 113)

What strikes us about her appearance first is her unusual colouring which is uncharacteristic of Polynesians. Taji too is puzzled by it:

After endeavouring in various ways to account for these things, I was led to imagine that the damsel must be an Albino (Tulla) occasionally to be met with among the people of the Pacific. These persons are of an exceedingly delicate white skin, tinted with a faint rose hue like the lips of a shell. Their hair is golden. But, unlike the Albinos of other climes, their eyes are invariably blue, and no way intolerant of light. (p. 126)

The ironic explanation of Yillah's colouring is that she is of his own race. Her origins are every bit as ordinary as his own. She was brought to Polynesia by her parents as a baby, and after they had been slain by the natives, she had been "set apart as a sacred offering" (p. 254) to Apo, the native deity. Both Yillah's physical characteristics and her origins bear an interesting resemblance to the beloved sought by Chiwantopel, the legendary Aztec hero who appears in the fantasies of one of Jung's patients. Chiwantopel expresses his longing for the beloved:

Will there never be anyone who will know my soul?--Yes, by almighty God, yes!--But ten thousand moons will wax and wane before her pure soul is born. And it is from another world that her parents will come to this one.<sup>17</sup>  
She will be fair of skin and fair-haired.

In Jung's view, the image of the beloved in both myth and private fantasy represents the love of the mother which the psyche strives to recover.<sup>18</sup>

Even more important than Yillah's colouring is the pearl she wears on her bosom. The significance of the pearl, a familiar symbol in literature and myth<sup>19</sup> is discussed by both Jung and Eliade:

In the darkness of the unconscious a treasure lies hidden, the same 'treasure hard to attain' which. . . is described as the shining pearl, or, to quote Paracelsus, as the 'mystery,' by which is meant a fascino-sum par excellence.<sup>20</sup>

and Eliade says,

Oysters, sea-shells, the snail and the pearl figure



constantly in aquatic cosmology as well as in sexual symbolism. They all participate, indeed, in the sacred powers which are concentrated in the waters, in the Moon and in Woman. . . .<sup>21</sup>

and again:

Its presence on the body connects the wearer with the very sources of the universal energy, fecundity and fertility.<sup>22</sup>

The pearl in Yillah's bosom represents the union of the divine or spiritual with its opposite, the sensual and earthly. It is both the "pearl of great price" associated in Christian tradition with the Kingdom of God, and "the treasure hard to attain" found in the instinctual, primordial realm of the unconscious. As if to emphasize the meaning, Melville makes the pearl "rose-coloured." The pearl is the symbol of divine love but the rose is the symbol of erotic love, so that here we have Eros and Agape united.<sup>23</sup> It is because Taji cannot accept this unity that he loses Yillah and hence his own soul. Her divinity he acknowledges but when she shows her other face in the guise of Hautia, the "Terrible Mother," the frightening, aggressive power of Eros, he fails to recognize her and flees in horror.

This horror, inspired in Taji by the figure of Hautia and her black-eyed emissaries, is deliberately but mysteriously associated by the author with his fear of "the three avengers" who pursue him throughout his journey around Mardi after his murder of their father, the priest from whom Taji captures Yillah. There is a suggestion here that the perfect unconditional love, the paradisal state in which mother and child exist alone together in perfect bliss, can be achieved only by an act of violence, and must consequently be accompanied by guilt. The temptation to interpret this part of the tale as the Oedipal pattern Freud finds in infantile sexuality--the child's unconscious wish to murder the father that he might have exclusive possession of the mother--is hard to resist. As in the infantile domestic drama the father enforces the taboos against the instinctual gratification of desire, so Aleema in Melville's myth, being a priest, is "a Kadee of the holy law."<sup>24</sup> His head is "white as the summit of Mont Blanc" (p. 108). (We remind the reader of the association of the colour white with the hero's father in Pierre). After murdering



the father-figure Taji is haunted by guilt, appearing throughout the novel in various guises: "Many visions I had of the green corse of the priest, outstretching its arms in the water to receive pale Yillah as she sunk in the sea" (p. 132). These visions and the threat of the three avengers mar the perfection of Taji's enjoyment of Yillah. Long before the discoveries of Freud, Reik, Jones and Jung, Melville must have known, whether consciously or not, that the guilt produced in the maturing psyche by the conflict between increasing consciousness and infantile sexuality makes the perfect enjoyment of mature love difficult if not impossible, unless one finds a way, as Taji could not, of coming to terms with the guilt.

The sexuality from which the guilt springs is represented in Melville's myth by Hautia, the seductress, who is presented in imagery of darkness intended to suggest her opposition to the principles symbolized by the figure of fair-haired Yillah: She appears first just before Yillah's disappearance "enveloped in a dark robe of tappa" (p. 154); her hand-maidens are "black-eyes damsels, deep brunettes" (p. 155) as opposed to Yillah's fair hair and blue eyes. While Yillah represents the passive love that has to be sought and captured, Hautia represents aggressive love. She pursues Taji with flower messages carried by her handmaidens and tries to lure him to her womb-cavern with the promise that there the lost Yillah will be found. She is "the vortex that draws all in" (p. 542). She is, in fact, the threat of erotic love in which Taji can see only destruction; therefore he flees from her in horror.

That Hautia, although apparently the extreme opposite of Yillah, is merely Yillah in a different disguise is suggested by her archetypal resemblance to "the Terrible Mother"<sup>25</sup> of myth, and by her mysterious connection with Yillah. As we have explained, the hero, who in myth is the archetype of the "self," that is to say, a projection of the strivings of the psyche for full development, is born of two mothers, the carnal and the divine. When the son fears the carnal mother (his own instinctuality) and sees in her only her destructive potential, she appears to him in the guise of "the Terrible Mother" whose tendency to draw the son back to her threatens his physical independence and development. That this is Hautia's



significance is suggested in a number of ways. The sensual, carnal nature of her lure hardly needs comment. Her aggressiveness, furthermore, points to "the Terrible Mother," who, Jung writes, "is often represented by a masculine principle in the mother herself." Still another reason for seeing in Hautia the threatening aspect of the mother is her resemblance to the "Spinning Woman" of the East whose significance is explained by Jung in Psyche and Symbol:

Had we not long since known it from the symbolism of dreams, this hint from the Orient would put us on the right track; the enveloping, embracing, and devouring element points unmistakably to the mother, that is, to the son's relation to the real mother, to her *imago*,<sup>26</sup> and to the woman who is to become a mother for him.

The "son's relation to the real mother" is hinted at in Melville's myth even in Hautia's name. "Haughty" is Melville's favourite word for describing a masculine, aggressive, terrifying woman; his own mother seemed so to him during his adolescence, and it is his favourite epithet for Pierre's mother.

Hautia eventually succeeds in luring Taji into her womb-cavern with the promise that there the lost Yillah will be found. She succeeds because in spite of Taji's hatred for her, he senses that she is in some mysterious way connected with Yillah:

But how connected were Hautia and Yillah? . . . Yillah was all beauty and innocence; my crown of felicity; my heaven below; and Hautia, my whole heart abhorred. Yillah I sought; Hautia sought me. One, openly, beckoned me here the other dimly allured me there. Yet now was I wildly dreaming to find them together. (p. 536)

Taji, however, failed to find Yillah in Hautia's cavern, not because she was not there, but because he refused to take the final necessary step and dive with Hautia into the waters of the cavern. He cannot face the reality that Hautia is in fact Yillah. When her identity is revealed by the rose-coloured pearl in her possession he feels only horror: "Back, shining monster! What, Hautia, is it thou? Oh, vipress, I could slay thee!" (p. 544) whereupon he flees from the cavern, still in pursuit of Yillah and still pursued by the three avengers.

Taji is the hero born of two mothers who refuses to acknowledge his relationship with one of them and therefore must relinquish his heroship.



"Now, I am my own soul's emperor; and my first act is abdication! Hail! realm of shades!" (p. 546). Taji, like Ahab, is the unredeemed hero, unredeemed because like Ahab, he refuses to accept the duality of his own nature, and is therefore doomed to self-annihilation:

Churned in foam, that outer ocean lashed the clouds;  
and straight in my white wake, headlong dashed a shallop,  
three fixed spectres leaning o'er its prow: three arrows  
poising.

And thus, pursuers and pursued flew on, over an  
endless sea.



CHAPTER V  
AHAB AND "THE TERRIBLE MOTHER"

Moby Dick, Melville's sixth novel, written when he had just turned thirty, is the most mature expression, both artistically and morally, of the themes we have watched him investigating experimentally in the five early novels. In it he finally achieved what he had been attempting to do from the beginning, use his first-hand observations of actual experience to create a symbolic tale of mythological proportions. Mardi failed in this respect because in it he abandoned the form in which his greatest skill lay, the narrative of "real" personal adventure. The others failed as great symbolic works because they comprised Melville's attempts to win or regain popular favour, and therefore lacked the depth and scope of which he was capable. In Moby Dick, he finally struck that dynamic balance between a realistic narrative of particular outward events and a symbolical portrayal of universal inward psychic processes, which makes the novel Melville's magnum opus and the greatest myth of the modern western world. Its importance is that which Jung attributes to all myths: "they explained to the bewildered human being what was going on in his unconscious and why he was held fast."<sup>1</sup> If one is inclined to doubt the validity of attributing this kind of meaning to Moby Dick, one should consider the deliberate hints that Melville himself has thrown out to the reader, primarily in the references to the Narcissus myth. In the first chapter of the novel the writer reminds us of this myth as if to put us on the alert for meanings that we might otherwise miss.

And still deeper [italics mine] the meaning of that story of Narcissus, who because he could not grasp the tormenting, mild image he saw in the fountain, plunged into it and was drowned. But that same image, we ourselves see in all rivers and oceans. It is the image of the ungraspable phantom of life; and this is the key to it all. (p. 3)

and later in the novel as Ahab looks at the doubloon he thinks:

this round gold is but the image of the rounder globe,  
which like a magician's glass, to each and every man  
in turn but mirrors back his own mysterious self. (p. 427)

Like the ancient mythmakers, Melville saw in the massive and mysterious phenomena of the external natural world reflections of the equally mysterious



phenomena of man's soul, the microcosm reflected in the macrocosm.

As we have seen, the phenomenon which most concerned Melville was that of growth, that is, the growth of the psyche, the process by which the "self" frees itself from the power of the archetypal parents and achieves psychic autonomy. To express his theme another way, Melville was aware of two principles in the nature of things, the instinctual, creative, motivating power of love associated with the mother, on the one hand, and on the other, rigid moral systems based on absolutes--justice, law, order--associated with the father. Selfhood cannot be achieved as long as one gives oneself up wholly to one or the other. The psyche must incorporate both principles into itself if it is to be free and fulfilled.

It is the maternal principle, however, which, because of its irresistably powerful attraction, constitutes the greatest threat. In Typee the hero recognizes the threat and frees himself from the mother-imago; in Mardi he is torn between desire for her and terror of her, a conflict projected in the figures of Yillah and Hautia; and in Moby Dick Ahab continues Taji's annihilating quest, with the difference that the desire and the terror are perverted into revenge and hatred, and directed toward a single object.

That the ambivalent nature of maternal love is an important theme in the novel is indicated by Melville's use of archetypal maternal symbols. In an earlier chapter we touched upon the "maternal significance of water" (see above p. 22). In addition to Jung, Mircea Eliade in Images and Symbols and Ernest Ingersoll in Dragons and Dragon Lore comment upon the association between water, fertility, and regeneration:

Water-worship, indeed, is a wide-spread and very ancient cult, the central idea being that water is the source and means of fertility and also of purification in its higher senses.<sup>2</sup>

Eliade emphasizes the ambivalence of the symbol:

immersion in the waters symbolizes a regression into the pre-formal, re-integration into the undifferentiated mode of pre-existence. Emergence repeats the cosmogonic act of formal manifestation; while immersion is equivalent to a dissolution of forms. That is why the symbolism of the Waters includes Death as well as Re-Birth.<sup>3</sup>

We have encountered Melville's symbolic use of the sea in earlier novels;



its importance in Moby Dick is implied in Ishmael's meditations upon water in the first chapter, in the unanswered questions that point to some mystery in the sea:

. . . . Why upon your first voyage as a passenger, did you yourself feel such a mystical vibration, when first told that you and your ship were now out of sight of land? Why did the Greeks give it a separate deity, and own brother of Jove? Surely all this is not without meaning. . . .  
(p. 3)

Could this mysterious meaning be found in the terrifying realm of the mother-imago? Later Ishmael refers to the sea thus:

a fiend to its own offspring; worse than the Persian host who murdered his own guests; sparing not the creatures which itself hath spawned. Like a savage tigress that tossing in the jungle overlays her own cubs, so the sea dashes even the mightiest whales against the rocks, and leaves them there side by side with the split wrecks of ships. (p. 273)

The dominant archetypal symbol of "the Terrible Mother who devours and destroys and thus symbolizes death itself"<sup>4</sup> is, however, the White Whale. Skepticism regarding the theory that the whale in Moby Dick is a symbol of the mother-imago can be easily met with references to the mythology and lore of the sea. The "Terrible Mother" is encountered in myth as some kind of monstrous and terrifying animal,<sup>5</sup> frequently "a voracious fish,"<sup>6</sup> a "water-monster,"<sup>7</sup> or a "whale-dragon."<sup>8</sup> The hero's relationship with the monster in Moby Dick is a reworking of the familiar mythological pattern in which the sun-hero is devoured by a water-monster and then is reborn from it.<sup>9</sup> Melville varies the legend by splitting the hero in two. Whereas in Mardi the duality of the hero's soul is symbolically projected as two mother figures, in Moby Dick it is represented by a split in the hero figure: Ahab who is destroyed by the sea and the monster it has spawned is a perversion of the legendary hero; Ishmael is the redeemed hero who is overcome by the monster but delivered from it. "It is easy to see," writes Jung, "what the battle with the sea monster means: it is the attempt to free the ego-consciousness from the deadly grip of the unconscious."<sup>10</sup> In this attempt Ahab is the defeated hero and Ishmael the surviving one.

Another clue to the meaning of the whale is found in its parallel



with the mythological dragon, the beast born in the legends of the Orient and carried westward as a demonic allegorical figure.<sup>11</sup> Both its symbolic significance and its association with water make it a worthy ancestor of Melville's whale:

It is connected with the powers and doings of the earliest gods, and like them is vague, changeable and contradictory in its attributes, maintaining from first to last only one definable characteristic--association with and control of water.<sup>12</sup>

Jung too makes mention of the dragon and explains that it represents "the negative mother-image,"<sup>13</sup> that is, the fear of the mother's power, and that the "whale-dragon" is a symbol "of the Terrible Mother, of the voracious maw, the jaws of death in which men are crunched and ground to pieces."<sup>14</sup> Melville himself, it is to be noted, admits dragon-slayers to the ancient and honourable fraternity of whalers:

Akin to the adventure of Perseus and Andromeda--indeed, by some supposed to be indirectly derived from it--is that famous story of St. George and the Dragon; which dragon I maintain to have been a whale; for in many old chronicles whales and dragons are strangely jumbled together, and often stand for each other. "Thou art as a lion of the waters, and as a dragon of the sea," saith Ezekial; hereby, plainly meaning a whale; in truth, some versions of the Bible use that word itself. Besides, it would much subtract from the glory of the exploit had St. George but encountered a crawling monster of the deep. Any man may kill a snake, but only a Perseus, a St. George, a Coffin, have the heart in them to march boldly up to a whale. (p. 359)

A particularly interesting aspect of dragon mythology because of the insight it gives into the relationship between the themes of Mardi and Moby Dick is the Dragon-Pearl. We have discussed Melville's symbolic use of the pearl and its deliberate association with the feminine in Mardi. The pearl is, by no mere coincidence, also associated with the dragon:

A most curious, interesting, and at the same time obscure feature of this whole baffling subject is that of the so-called Pearl which accompanies the dragon in pictures and legends of the whole East--India, China and Japan. . . .<sup>15</sup>

The exact relationship between the dragon and its pearl varies. In the Korean cult of the dragon, it is thought to be the guardian of the pearl or some sacred jewel;<sup>16</sup> or again the pearl is thought of as produced by



the dragon, as being "spit out" by it.<sup>17</sup> In view of the importance played by the pearl in Mardi, Melville's first deliberate experiment with symbolism, we would be surprised if it did not turn up again in Moby Dick. And indeed it does. Would we be stretching our interpretation of the book too far if we called the doubloon nailed to the masthead of the Pequod a variation of the pearl motif? Observe Ingersoll's description of the Dragon-Pearl:

This extraordinary gem is represented as a spherical object or 'ball' . . . . The gem is white or bluish with a reddish or golden halo, and usually has an antler-shaped 'flame' rising from its surface. Almost invariably there hangs downward from the centre of the sphere a dark-coloured, comma-like appendage, frequently branched, wavering below the periphery. A biologist might easily at first glance conclude that the whole affair represented the entry of a spermatozoon into an ovum; and the Chinese commonly interpret the ball with its comma-mark as a symbol of yang and yin, male and female elements, combined in the earth--which seems pretty close to the biologist's view. Such is the Dragon-Pearl.

and then Melville's description of the doubloon:

Now this doubloon was of purest, virgin gold, raked somewhere out of the heart of gorgeous hills, whence, east and west, over golden sanas, the head-waters of many a Pactolus flows. And though now nailed amidst all the rustiness of iron bolts and the verdigris of copper spikes, yet, untoouchable and immaculate to any foulness, it still preserved its Quito glow.

. . . . For it was set apart and sanctified to one awe-striking end; and however wanton in their sailor ways, one and all, the mariners revered it as the White Whale's talisman [italics mine] . . . . On its round border it bore the letters, REPUBLICA DEL ECUADOR: QUITO. . . . Zoned by those letters you saw the likeness the three Andes' summits; from one a flame; a tower on another; on the third a crowing cock; while arching over all was a segment of the partitioned zodiac, the signs all marked with their usual cabalistics, and the keystone sun entering the equinoctial point at Libra. (p. 426)

The "biologist's view" of "the White Whale's talisman" would be no less interesting than his view of "the Dragon-Pearl." But biology apart, the association of a treasure, usually a jewel and frequently a pearl, with the monster to be overcome is commented upon in most studies of mythology.



Interpretations of the symbolism of Melville's whale invariably call it, among other things, an embodiment of the forces of nature; this again points to the mother-imago. Traditionally Nature is thought of as female and maternal, and in mythology the ambivalent fear-longing combination that it inspires is associated with the mother. Eliade speaks of the longing for the mother as "the desire to re-enter into the bliss of living Matter;"<sup>19</sup> and Jung explains the fear thus:

Just as the mother seems a giantess to the small child,  
so the attribute of size passes to the archetypal Great  
Mother, Mother Nature.<sup>20</sup>

Again, Ingersoll's description of primitive man's ambivalent view of nature could well apply to Moby Dick:

an immense, contradictory, insolvable mystery, a mixture  
of light and darkness, sunshine and storm, things helpful  
to him contending, as if animated with things harmful,  
life alternating with death and decay.<sup>21</sup>

Certain archetypal symbols associated with the whale reinforce its significance as the mother-imago. We have already mentioned in an earlier chapter Melville's incidental use of horse imagery and its possible significance. In Moby Dick the use of the imagery is more than incidental. A large part of the chapter called "The Whiteness of the Whale" is devoted to a description of "the White Steed of the Prairies," whose colour is associated with that of Moby Dick and described as "cool milkeness" and "spiritual whiteness" (p. 187). The significance of the horse symbol and its maternal associations in mythology and fantasy has been discussed at length by Ernest Jones in The Nightmare<sup>22</sup> and by Jung in Symbols of Transformation.<sup>23</sup>

A still more interesting image associated with the whale is "The Sphinx," the title of the chapter describing the decapitation of a Sperm Whale and the hoisting on its head against the ship's side. Ahab comes onto the quarterdeck and stands "leaning over with eyes attentively fixed on this head,"

It was a black and hooded head; and hanging there in  
the midst of so intense a calm, it seemed the Sphinx's  
in the desert. "Speak, thou vast and venerable head,"  
muttered Ahab, "which, though ungarnished with a  
beard, yet here and there lookest hoary with mosses;  
speak, mighty head, and tell us the secret thing that



is in thee. (p. 308)

Again mythology answers for us the riddle of "the secret thing":

The word "sphinx" suggests "riddle," an enigmatic creature who propounds riddles, like the Sphinx of Oedipus, and stands on the threshold of one's fate as though symbolically announcing the inevitable. The Sphinx is a semi-theriomorphic representation of the mother-imago, or rather of the Terrible Mother, who has left numerous traces in mythology. . . . The Sphinx. . . shows clear traces of a mother derivative. . . . The riddle of the Sphinx was herself--the terrible mother-imago, which Oedipus would not take as a warning.<sup>24</sup>

The argument that the whale is a representative of the mother-imago is further re-inforced by specific feminine and maternal characteristics attributed to it. In the chapter, "Cistern and Buckets," the episode in which Queequeg delivers Tashtego from the whale's head is described in humorously obstetrical terms:

He averred, that upon first thrusting in for him a leg was presented; but well knowing that that was not as it ought to be and might occasion great trouble; --he had thrust back the leg, and by a dexterous heave and toss, had wrought a somerset upon the Indian; so that with the next trial, he came forth in the good old way--head foremost. As for the great head itself, that was doing as well as could be expected. (p. 341)

One wonders whether humour is all that is intended in the references to midwifery. Indeed, the serious functions of Melville's sexual jokes has been the subject of a recent essay.<sup>25</sup> Certainly in the passage we have been discussing the life-death duality of the womb is apparent in the final paragraph of the chapter:

Now, had Tashtego perished in that head, it had been a very precious perishing; smothered in the very whitest and daintiest of fragrant spermaceti; coffined, hearsed, and tombed in the secret inner chamber and sanctum sanctorum of the whale. (p. 342)

The womb imagery appears again in the chapter called "The Grand Armada," describing the "vast fleet of whales" sighted near the straits of Sunda:

we glided between two whales into the innermost heart of the shoal, as if from some mountain torrent we had slid into a serene valley lake. . . . We must watch for a breach in the living wall that hemmed us in; the wall that had only admitted us in order to shut us up. (p. 383)



In the same chapter reference is made to "the nursing mothers of the whales, and those that by their enormous girth seemed shortly to become mothers" (p. 384) and Queequeg draws Starbuck's attention to "the umbilical cord of Madame Leviathan, by which the young cub seemed still tethered to its dam" (p. 384). This apparently minor incident is significant as a reminder of "the monkey-rope" by which Ishmael is "wedded" to Queequeg "for better or for worse" (317) and as a prelude to the climax of the novel in which Ahab is destroyed by the line that connects him with Moby Dick.

The most serious challenge to the argument that Moby Dick is an archetypal mother is that he is male and described in phallic terms, but it is a challenge that can be met by either of two defences. The first one, based upon Jung, is that the mother-imago in its "Terrible" form tends to take on masculine characteristics, as did Melville's own mother, Maria Melville, and her fictional counterparts, Hautia in Mardi and Mary Glendinning in Pierre. The reason for this, as we have explained, is that the son's own libido, which he fears, is associated with the mother. That is why the goddesses of primitive mythologies often "came to possess phallic symbols, even though the latter are essentially masculine."<sup>26</sup> The alternative defence is that Moby Dick is not exclusively the archetypal mother, but "the archetypal parent," both father and mother, but with the male characteristics predominating, because, true to the archetypal pattern, the father hides the mother from the son, that is, as enforcer of the incest taboo, he keeps the mother from the son; he stands guard over the treasure.<sup>27</sup>

Seeing in Moby Dick the archetypal parent that is both male and female suggests an interpretation of the whiteness of the whale. Whiteness for Melville seems to be associated with the paternal principle, that is, the rigid morality of absolutes, the inhibiting authoritative morality of discipline, law and justice as opposed to the instinctual morality of Love: White-jacket could not become a man until he had shed his whiteness, his adolescent reliance on absolutes, and been reborn from the maternal waters of Love; Taji could not become a man because of his fruitless quest for the Absolute, represented by the 'albino' Yillah; the



father-priest, representing the law in Mardi had white hair; the memory of the hero's father in Pierre is enshrined in a "perfect marble form. . . snow-white and serene" (p. 93). It is not only possible but probable, furthermore, in view of Melville's wide reading in Oriental lore, that he was familiar with the ancient Eastern cult of Feng-shui of which a basic belief was that man is controlled by two influences, heaven and earth, symbolized by a White Tiger and a Green Dragon, the same two influences that in Pierre Melville refers to as Coelus and Terra (p. 483). Both influences are embodied in the White Whale, but the one represented by the White Tiger, that is, the paternal one hides the other from view. Yet Ahab senses the other principle beyond "the unreasoning mask" of the whale's whiteness:

some unknown but still reasoning thing puts forth the mouldings of its features from behind the unreasoning mask. If man will strike, strike through the mask! How can the prisoner reach outside except by thrusting through the wall? To me, the white whale is that wall, shoved near to me. Sometimes I think there's naught beyond. But 'tis enough. (p. 161)

What is beyond is the mother, the creative, mobile power of Love, which the lonely and rebellious orphan cannot reach. He knows his "fiery father" but his "sweet mother" he knows not.

I now know thee, thou clear spirit, and I now know that thy right worship is defiance. To neither love nor reverence wilt thou be kind. . . . In the midst of the personified impersonal, a personality stands here. . . . the queenly personality lives in me, and feels her royal rights. . . . Come in thy lowest form of love, and I will kneel and kiss thee. . . . Oh, cruel! what hast thou done with her? There lies my puzzle. . . . (pp. 498-499)

Ahab's tragedy is his inability to acknowledge consciously that what he longs for is embodied in the object of his hatred, the albino whale, just as Taji's tragedy was his refusal to acknowledge the duality of the albino Yillah. Ahab, like Taji, is the unredeemed hero at war with part of his own nature, the part from which he cannot wrench himself free in spite of his Promethean struggle. He fails to understand that his only means of redemption, of rebirth, of freedom, is hidden deep within the very thing he wants to destroy.



Ahab is, indeed not merely unredeemed; he is a perversion of the hero archetype. As we have explained, the hero, in Jung's view is the archetype of the "self"; that is, the deeds of the hero are symbolic projections of the longing of the self for its own growth. That is why the pattern is so often one of quest followed by a struggle with a monster which is overcome and destroyed.<sup>29</sup> The pattern nearly always involves some form of rebirth. Jung cites several examples of heroes who are swallowed by monsters and are then "reborn," that is, they overcome the monster from the inside and get out. Jung speaks of "the almost worldwide myth of the typical deed of the hero:"

He journeys by ship, fights the sea monster, is swallowed, struggles against being bitten and crushed to death, and having arrived inside the 'whale-dragon,' seeks the vital organ, which he proceeds to cut off or otherwise destroy. Often the monster is killed by the hero lighting a fire inside him--that is to say, in the very womb of death he secretly creates life, the rising sun.<sup>30</sup>

Ahab, however, never gets inside the whale so that he can experience rebirth from it, and instead of destroying it he is destroyed by it. Father Mapple's Sermon on the Book of Jonah near the beginning of the novel is surely intended as a clue to the significance of Ahab's fate:

But what is the lesson that the book of Jonah teaches? Shipmates, it is a two-stranded lesson; a lesson to us all as sinful men, and a lesson to me as a pilot of the living God. As sinful men, it is a lesson to us all, because it is a story of the sin, hard-heartedness, suddenly awakened fears, the swift punishment, repentance, prayers and finally the deliverance and joy of Jonah . . . if we obey God, we must disobey ourselves; and it is in this disobeying ourselves, wherein the hardness of obeying God consists. (p. 41)

Jonah is delivered from the whale because he repents of his hard-heartedness; Ahab is the unredeemed Jonah lacking the power to disobey himself.

We have called Ahab the "unredeemed hero," a "perversion of the hero archetype." We might go one step further and call him an Antichrist. The reader will recall that Jung regards Christ as the "culture hero" of Western civilization, "the archetype of the self," who "represents a totality of a divine or heavenly kind," and whose kingdom is "the pearl of great price."<sup>31</sup> Jung explains his superiority over other culture heroes thus:



In the Mithraic sacrifice the conquest of instinctuality no longer takes the archaic form of overpowering the mother, but of renouncing one's own instinctive desires. The primitive idea of reproducing oneself by entering into the mother's body has become so remote that the hero, instead of committing incest, is now sufficiently far advanced in the domestic virtues to seek immortality through the sacrifice of the incest tendency. This significant change finds its true fulfilment only in the symbol of the crucified God. In atonement for Adam's sin a bloody human sacrifice is hung upon the tree of life. Although the tree of life has a mother significance, it is no longer the mother, but a symbolical equivalent to which the hero offers up his life. One can hardly imagine a symbol which expresses more drastically the subjugation of instinct. Even the manner of death reveals the symbolic content of this act. The hero suspends himself in the branches of the maternal tree by allowing his arms to be nailed to the cross. We can say that he unites himself with the mother in death and at the same time negates the act of union, paying for his guilt with deadly torment.<sup>32</sup>

Psychologically such a hero demands his opposite, "the shadow of the self," the "perverse imitator of Christ's life," the "spirit of evil who follows in Christ's footsteps like a shadow following the body"--the Antichrist.<sup>33</sup> Such phrases immediately bring to mind the Black Mass in Moby Dick, the fact that Ahab's ship sails on Christmas Day, and that he sleeps "with his own bloody nails in his palms" (p. 198). We are reminded too of Ahab's soliloquy beside a dying whale, in which he expresses his fatalistic dedication to the "dark Hindoo half of nature:" "Yet dost thou, darker half, rock me with a prouder, if a darker faith" (p. 489).

The best clue to the meaning of the figure of Ahab, however, is found in one of Melville's letters to Hawthorne: "This is the book's motto (the secret one),--Ego non baptizo te in nomine--but make out the rest yourself."<sup>34</sup> It is a reference to Ahab's words when he baptizes, with the blood of the pagan harpooneers, the harpoon with which he plans to kill Moby Dick: "Ego non baptizo te in nomine patris, sed in nomine diaboli" (p. 483). Unlike Melville's other Antichrist, Pierre, Ahab is at least not guilty of self-righteousness. He knows whose side he is on.

The greatness of the figure of Ahab, however, is that he is a tragic Antichrist. Like all truly tragic figures, he is a man of great power on



whom fate has inflicted a suffering from which there is no escape. As Newton Arvin has said:

Ahab is the suffering and neurotic self, lamed by early experience so vitally that it can devote itself only to destructive ends and find rest only in self-annihilation.<sup>35</sup>

What is this early experience that has lamed him so vitally? He lost his leg to the whale. The devouring "Terrible Mother" has robbed him of "the phallic source of vital potency,"<sup>36</sup> that is, she has robbed him of the strength by which he might free himself from her. Ahab is in one sense merely a more hopeless version of the lame hero of Typee whose infantile impotence brings him to the edge of annihilation by the cannibals. Tommo frees himself from the devouring Mother but Ahab is bound to her by an invisible cord that draws him after her, "consumed with one unachieved revengeful desire" (p. 198). Since he cannot get free of her he will destroy her. His suffering gains additional poignancy from the brief moment of reconciliation he experiences just before the chase:

That glad, happy air, that winsome sky, did at last stroke and caress him; the step-mother world, so long cruel-- forbidding--now threw affectionate arms round his stubborn neck, and did seem to joyously sob over him as if over one, that however wilful and erring, she could yet find it in her heart to save and to bless. From beneath his slouched hat Ahab dropped a tear into the sea; nor did all the Pacific contain such wealth as that one wee drop. (p. 532)

Ahab's final encounter with the whale is a breaking of the terrible archetypal taboo, which re-establishes the original umbilical connection: "let me then ~~two~~ to pieces, while still chasing thee, though tied to thee, thou damned whale! Thus, I give up the spear!" (p. 564). It is the line connecting Ahab with the whale that ultimately brings his death! He is the mythical dragon-slayer, who is slain by the dragon.<sup>37</sup>

If then we regard Ahab as a kind of tragic anti-hero, we are faced with the question, Does the novel have a true hero? As we have suggested, Ishmael in one respect qualifies, for he is "redeemed," that is, he experiences immersion in and deliverance from a new mother, represented by several symbols, the most important of which is Queequeg, the dark-skinned mother-imago we encountered in the early novels. If one is inclined to doubt the validity of calling Queequeg a symbolic mother, one



need only recall Ishmael's account of a childhood dream that he remembers while sleeping cosily in Queequeg's embrace, a dream in which he was punished for trying to crawl up his mother's chimney: One should remember also the "cord" with which he is tied to Queequeg in the chapter called "The Monkey-Rope," and the obvious symbolic intent of Queequeg's coffin by which Ishmael is saved. "The chest or casket is a female symbol, i.e., the womb, a common enough conception in the older mythologies."<sup>38</sup> In the final chapter of the book we meet two other symbolic mothers. Through immersion in the regenerative ambiotic waters of the sea Ishmael experiences the life-giving reconciliation with the mother and is finally picked up by "the devious-cruising Rachel, that in her retracing search after her missing children, only found another orphan."

Ishmael, although the only survivor of the catastrophe, is, however, hardly heroic, for he does not save himself. Things happen to Ishmael; he does not cause things to happen. He is too passive to be a true hero. The question we are left with then is this: Why has Melville perverted the familiar mythological pattern and created a novel with an anti-hero of gigantic proportions instead of a hero. Could it be that Ahab is Melville's answer to the kind of optimism represented by Walt Whitman, an optimism which saw in America~~s~~ the potential for a race of heroes, of demi-gods, indeed, a race of Christs? Could Ahab be the embodiment of a warning that the apparently self-reliant, independent, individualist, defying even the ultimate authority, who typifies the American dream is in fact no hero at all, but a maniacal victim of his own destructive <sup>5</sup>pasions?



## CHAPTER VI

### PIERRE: THE FATAL UNION WITH THE MOTHER

"As long as we have anything more to do, we have done nothing. . . . Leviathan is not the biggest fish;--I have heard of Krakens."<sup>1</sup> These words are from a letter Melville wrote to Hawthorne in November, 1851, just after he had completed Moby Dick. The "Kraken" he had in mind was Pierre, the proofs of which were in the hands of his British publisher only six months later. In the letter accompanying the proofs, Melville replies to Bentley's complaint about the financial losses he had suffered from the publication of Melville's previous works, with the assurance that Pierre is "very much more calculated for popularity than anything you have yet published of mine."<sup>2</sup> These words must be the most pathetically ironic ones Melville ever wrote, for Pierre is the most esoteric of his novels and certainly no country idyl for feminine readers as his letter to Sophia Hawthorne in January, 1852, had suggested it would be.<sup>3</sup> Its critical reception was, on the whole, completely damning. The first review, on either side of the Atlantic, is fairly typical:

Whoever buys the book on the strength of Melville's reputation, will be cheating himself of his money, and we believe we shall never see the man who has endured the reading of the whole of it.<sup>4</sup>

The theory generally advanced to account for the apparent failure of the book as a work of art is that Melville's physical and mental health had been seriously depleted by the strain of producing his magnum opus, that he was a "sick man,"<sup>5</sup> suffering under the emotional and financial burden of trying to make a living as a writer for a large family, and that the new novel was a desperate attempt to win the public by trying something of "unquestionable novelty."<sup>6</sup>

Modern critics, however, with some knowledge of depth psychology at their disposal, see considerable worth in the book. H. A. Murray, in his Introduction to Pierre, says that it is a forerunner of the work of Henry James, Proust, "and the whole modern school of psychological novelists"<sup>7</sup>; and Richard Chase, another representative of the school of psychological criticism, calls the book "the product of a great intelligence in the act of affirming its maturity by disburdening itself of a great insanity."<sup>8</sup>



Indeed, whatever the weaknesses of the book as a work of art, there can be little doubt that it is Melville's most transparent statement of his moral position, a position he reached only after long and arduous struggle, and one which is several steps beyond the intellectual and spiritual grasp of his confused, adolescent, self-destructive hero, Pierre. That is why it is misleading--although certainly the novel contains many autobiographical elements--to identify Melville too completely with his hero, to regard the novel as "the hushed story"<sup>9</sup> of its author's life. Melville has great sympathy for his hero because he understands his predicament, but Pierre's confusion, we insist, is not Melville's. Melville is always wiser than his heroes, who represent early stages in Melville's inner development.

The "unquestionable novelty" of the book is not novelty of theme. As if Melville were afraid that he had not taught his lesson clearly enough, he gives us in Pierre his most overt account of the tragedy of the castrated son who is deprived of the power to free himself from the fatal attraction of the archetypal parent, of the orphan-soul clamouring "for the support of its mother, the world, and its father the Deity" (p. 142). In Pierre we find an undisguised statement of the central and unifying theme of Melville's first seven novels:

Watch yon little toddler, how long it is learning to stand by itself! First it shrieks and implores, and will not try to stand at all, unless both father and mother uphold it; then a little more bold, it must, at least, feel one parental hand, else again the cry and the tremble; long time is it ere by degrees this child comes to stand without any support. (p. 412)

The thematic relationship between Pierre and Moby Dick becomes evident when we compare their "heroes," for Pierre is merely an immature Ahab. They are both Promethean rebels, both anti-Christs, but with the one important difference that Ahab knows whose side he is on, while Pierre thrashes about confusedly trying to decide whether, in his loyalty to his own deepest nature, he is following Christ or Satan, unable or unwilling to accept the paradox that he is neither and both. Ahab, like Milton's Satan, might be mistaken for a hero in his courageous defiance and strength of will, and as if Melville himself saw such a danger, he created a new Ahab about whom there can be no mistake. Pierre is a more



direct statement than Moby Dick of Melville's moral philosophy: the complete man, the true hero, is he who has come to terms with the opposing forces within himself, the conscious which aspires to understanding and wisdom, and the unconscious, or 'anima,' which is the source of creative energy. Neither is the absolute Good or the absolute Evil; it is only the adolescent, the anti-hero, who hopes to find the Absolute in the one or the other of the extremes. Under "the tyranny of a usurper mood" (p. 252), Pierre mistakes his own soul's image (Isabel) for God, and opposing it to the forces represented by Lucy, is faced with "this all-including query--Lucy or God?" (p. 253). Pierre, like Ahab, is held fast in the grip of his own instinctual nature (the mother-imago) which he is unable to reconcile with the age-tested wisdom of the world (the paternal principle).

The early chapters of the novel are devoted to a description of the idyllic life of the young hero in his ancestral home, Saddle Meadows, where he lives a life of absolute happiness and absolute innocence. Since there is no attempt at realistic description of either setting or character it would seem that the perfection of Pierre's blissful existence is intended to be allegorical. Charles Moorman argues that the novel is a reworking of the myth of the Fall and points to some convincing evidence that Saddle Meadows is described in imagery suggesting the Garden of Eden.<sup>10</sup> The pattern of Pierre's life, furthermore, conforms perfectly to the "second phase" of the myth of the hero in romance as it is described by Frye:

The second phase brings us to the innocent youth of the hero, a phase most familiar to us from the story of Adam and Eve in Eden before the Fall. In literature this phase presents a pastoral and Arcadian world, generally a pleasant wooded landscape, full of glades, shaded valleys, murmuring brooks, the moon, and other images closely linked with the female or maternal aspect of sexual imagery. Its heraldic colors are green and gold. . . . it tends to center on a youthful hero, still overshadowed by parents, . . . . The archetype of erotic innocence is less commonly marriage than the kind of "chaste" love that precedes marriage. . . .<sup>11</sup>

Pierre lives in precisely such an Arcadian "green and golden world" (p. 1); he is "overshadowed" by a queenly and haughty mother who is the archetypal parent, combining masculine and feminine qualities; and he has a "chaste" relationship with a sexless girl who is little more than an extension of



his mother.

Psychologically this image of Eden represents the perfect bliss and innocence of the world of infancy before the awakening of consciousness. It is a world centered around the mother and child. The father is dead (infantile wish-fulfillment in Freudian theory) and there are no brothers and sisters with whom the child need share his mother's love. But most important of all, notice that the son's relationship with his mother is a perfect expression not only of Freudian infantile wish fulfillment (she is an erotic object), but also of the Jungian "anima-projection" ("the anima is the mother-sister-wife"<sup>12</sup>). Melville is quite specific about Mrs. Glendinning's desirability as an erotic object:

In mature age, the rose still miraculously clung to her cheek; liteness had not yet completely uncoiled itself from her waist, nor smoothness unscrolled itself from her brow, nor diamondness departed from her eyes. So that when lit up and bediademed by ball-room lights, Mrs. Glendinning still eclipsed far younger charms, and had she chosen to encourage them, would have been followed by a train of infatuated suitors, little less young than her own son Pierre. (p. 3)

Indeed the devotion of her own son Pierre is described as "courteous lover-like adoration." (p. 20) But Mrs. Glendinning is not only an erotic object; she is also sister and wife. Pierre playfully addresses her as Sister Mary; and his future wife, Lucy, merely an extension of his mother, offers no threat to Mrs. Glendinning's position as the "queen" of Pierre's world: "His little wife, that is to be, will not estrange him from me; for she too is docile--beautiful, and reverential, and most docile" (p. 25). Pierre's relationship with his mother then represents the archetypal bond between mother and son, the absolute exclusive relationship in which the mother is all things to the child, the relationship to which the psyche forever longs to return.

As Melville has demonstrated in earlier novels, the psyche must free itself from the world of Absolutes if it is to fulfill its destiny; it must become aware of the paradoxes, "the antagonistic agencies" (p. 87), "The Ambiguities"; it must discover that the opposite of light is darkness and that without one the other has no meaning. Pierre lives in a world in which all is light, in which the dark side of life is hidden by a mask of



"whiteness," the most important and significant recurring image in Melville's work. In Pierre the image is associated with the blondness of Lucy, who is pure, angelic, nun-like and completely passionless. F. I. Carpenter, in an essay aptly entitled "Puritans Preferred Blonds," a discussion of the symbolism of the blond and brunette heroines in the novels of Melville and Hawthorne, sees the blond Lucy as a symbol of that exclusive purity which involves "a denial of experience."<sup>13</sup> But even more specific than Lucy's conventional blondness is the repeated use of the word "white" to describe objects associated with her; "a snow-white glossy pillow," (p. 2) "a snow-white bed," (p. 53) "a snow-white ruffled thing" (p. 54) (her nightdress?) whose "sacred secrets" Pierre "longed to unroll."

Whiteness is also associated with Pierre's dead father whose memory is enshrined in a white marble monument:

In this shrine, in this niche of this pillar, stood the perfect marble form of his departed father; without blemish, unclouded, snow-white, and serene; Pierre's fond personification of perfect human goodness and virtue. . . . Not to God had Pierre ever gone in his heart, unless by ascending the steps of that shrine, and so making it the vestibule of his abstractest religion. (p. 93)

In this example the association of whiteness with the paternal principle is obvious, but, ironically, Pierre's whole world, in spite of the fact that it is dominated by a woman, is lacking in the feminine principle, what the East calls "yin." It is a world in which the instinctual is completely suppressed by tradition, convention, propriety, respectability, a world that will not allow itself to be contaminated by the embarrassing pregnancy of an unwed servant girl. If the reader is confused by our insistence on the "paternal" nature of Pierre's "mother-centered" world, we remind him that Mrs. Glendinning herself is, like Melville's own mother, a usurper of the masculine role;

she crossed the room, and--resting in a corner--her glad proud eye met the old General's baton, which the day before in one of his frolic moods Pierre had taken from its accustomed place in the pictured-bannered hall. She lifted it, and musingly swayed it to and fro; then paused, and staff-wise rested with it in her hand. Her stately beauty had ever somewhat martial in it; and now she looked the daughter of a General, as she was; for Pierre's was a double



revolutionary descent. (p. 26)

It is impossible to believe that Melville, though writing in a pre-Freudian era, was not consciously aware of the significance of that baton, nor that the sun in his reference to Mrs. Glendinning's "erecting her haughtiness" (p. 258) was not deliberate.

Pierre's paternal world of snow-white Absolutes is, as he soon discovers, a mask, beneath which something both desirable and threatening is hiding, a something which is hinted at in the snake imagery pervading early chapters of the book,<sup>14</sup> and which suggests what Frye calls "the sense of being close to a moral taboo," a characteristic of the "prison-Paradise or unborn world from which the central characters long to escape to a lower world."<sup>15</sup>

This lower world is represented by the dark-haired Isabel, of whose face Pierre begins to catch glimpses through the mask of whiteness. The illegitimate daughter of Pierre's father and hence Pierre's half-sister, she represents the opposite of everything in Pierre's world, the breaking of the moral taboos on which his world is constructed, the submission to instinct and passion, in short, the instinctual realm of the mother-imago. She enters Pierre's world by accident, having obtained employment in the household of a local farmer, and even before Pierre has any inkling of who she is, her face has a profound and disturbing effect on him:

Mysterious girl! who art thou? by what right snatches<sup>t</sup>  
thou thus my deepest thoughts? . . . What, who are thou?  
Oh! wretched vagueness--too familiar to me, yet inexplicable,--unknown, utterly unknown! I seem to founder in  
this perplexity. (p. 56)

and later,

Most miraculous of all to Pierre was the vague impression, that somewhere he had seen traits of the likeness of that face before. But where, he could not say, nor could he in the remotest degree imagine. (p. 67)

Pierre's reaction to the Face, says H. A. Murray, "is the best description in literature, I believe, of the autonomous inward operation of the aroused soul image, or anima, as Jung has named it."<sup>16</sup> Pierre cannot resist the fatal attraction of this image. Discovering that Isabel is his half-sister, and that her life of loneliness and suffering is the product of his father's



"sin," his whole scale of moral values is turned upside down. Temporarily paralyzed by this moral reversal which plunges him into a morass of indecision, he becomes fascinated by "the interior meaning" (p. 236) of Hamlet, whose hero was, like Pierre himself, made impotent by the conflict between desire and guilt, and by Dante's Inferno, symbolizing the demonic world of the unconscious on whose brink Pierre temporarily hesitates because of the ominous words "overscribed within the arch of the outgoings of the womb of human life:"

Through me you pass into the city of Woe,  
Through me you pass into eternal pain;  
Through me, among the people lost for aye. (p. 235)

Pierre, however, fails to understand this prophetic vision of his own fate. He turns his back on the "white" world of moral law to follow the deepest instinct of his own being, "a divine unidentifiability" (p. 125) which tells him to abandon everything that he has hitherto valued in order to protect and comfort Isabel. Full of self-righteous sentiments about following "Virtue to her uttermost vista" (p. 380), he fails at first to recognize the dual nature of those instincts. He assumes that his decision to run away with Isabel is prompted only by lofty ideals of self-sacrifice, but Melville makes sure that the reader is under no such illusion, and that the hero himself is not allowed the comfort of the illusion for long:

The girl moved not; was done with all her tremblings; leaned closer to him, with an inexpressible strangeness of an intense love, new and inexplicable. Over the face of Pierre there shot a terrible self-revelation; he imprinted repeated burning kisses upon her; pressed hard her hand; would not let go her sweet and awful passiveness. (p. 268)

Following this passage the serpent imagery is used to reinforce the meaning: "Then they changed; they coiled together, and entangledly stood mute."

The incest theme is brought to the surface in at least two other important passages near the end of the novel. As Pierre sits at his desk trying to work, "a nameless torpor" (p. 476) steals over him in which he has a vision of the Mount of Titans, "a singular height" (p. 476) near his ancestral manor. The name of the mountain reminds him of the myth of Enceladus, who was the grandson of an incestuous union between Coelus and Terra, Heaven and Earth, and the son of an incestuous union between Terra



and her son Titan. The meaning of the myth for Pierre seems to be that his own "Titanic," "sky-assaulting" soul is of divine origin, being "on one side the grandson of the sky" (p. 483). The incestuous nature or the union which produced his Promethean soul, however, hints that its divine origins do not ensure the purity of that soul nor of the actions it motivates.

The ambivalence of Pierre's Prometheanism is suggested again by the portrait of Beatrice Cenci, one of the paintings at an exhibition visited by Lucy, Pierre and Isabel in the last chapter of the novel. The author draws the reader's attention to the incongruity between the physical characteristics of the portrait's subject--blonde hair and blue eyes, the symbols of divinity and purity--and the crimes with which she is associated:

But with blue eyes and fair complexion, the Cenci's hair is golden. . . . which, nevertheless, still the more intensifies the suggested fanciful anomaly of so sweetly and seraphically blonde a being, being double-hooded, as it were, by the black crape of the two most horrible crimes . . . possible to civilized humanity--incest and paricide. (p. 489)

Again we are given the suggestion that human action is motivated not by an absolute, but a "double-hooded" power.

The dual nature of the forces symbolized by Isabel is the most important theme of the book. On the one hand she represents life, fertility, creative power, suggested by the pine tree and the sea, both of which she is associated with, and by her long luxuriant dark hair and her guitar, which are given deliberate symbolic significance.<sup>17</sup> Through Isabel were released in Pierre latent primordial powers without which he could never have shed his idealistic and inhibiting cloak of moral absolutes and, along with "Ugliness and Poverty and Infamy" (p. 126), discovered his own instinctive capacity for generosity of spirit, and for decisive and independent action. On the other hand, Isabel represents the forces of destruction. She is "the Terrible Mother" in her most attractive disguise. Even her name is suggestive. Bates Murray and Chase connect it with the Hebrew "Jezebel" and with the Babylonian deity, Bel.<sup>18</sup> Chase has a particularly interesting comment on an early scene in the novel:

When Pierre first visits Isabel, he finds her in a red farm house by a dark lake, which he approaches through the woods. She sings her strange chant: "Mystery!"



Mystery! Mystery of Isabel!" Later she gives him a drink (presumably wine) from a cup. This is Melville's version of St. John's dream of the whore whom, after being carried through the wilderness, he saw sitting upon many waters on a scarlet-colored beast, holding a golden cup full of abominations and bearing on her forehead the words "MYSTERY? BABYLON THE GREAT? THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH."<sup>19</sup>

New York, furthermore, where Pierre takes Isabel to live, is a kind of Babylon, representing the wickedness against which he has been warned by his moral mentors, but for which his unconscious longs. The city's "first welcome to youth" is a "scarlet-cheeked, glaringly arrayed" prostitute "horribly lit by the green and yellow rays from the druggist's" (p. 331). From the moment of this first welcome Pierre's destruction progresses steadily and inevitably. He has escaped the castrating tendency of his literal mother, who kept from him "the truth of a man" (p. 126), only to become the victim of the destructive power of a more terrible mother. "The city," says Jung, "is a maternal symbol, a woman who harbours the inhabitants in herself like children,"<sup>20</sup> and "Babylon is the symbol of the Terrible Mother."<sup>21</sup>

Pierre's tragic error, like Taji's, and like Ahab's, is his refusal to accept the duality of his own nature, symbolically projected in the duality of the mother-imago. He mistakes his newly-awakened potency, his "intense procreative enthusiasm" (p. 492) for the absolute Good, and consequently gives himself over unconditionally to its power. He is an anti-Christ who imagines that he is Christ, because he fails to understand that Christ represents, not unconditional submission to instinct in preference to moral law, but the victory of consciousness over instinct. The novel provides plenty of evidence that the reader is intended to recognize Pierre as a perversion of Christ: His mother is "Mary," the "queen" who presides over the Eden of Saddle Meadows; he is a law-breaker, putting embarrassing questions to the pharisees of his world (p. 142ff.). He has "a Christ-like feeling," and quotes the words of Christ; (p. 127) he refers to his breaking bread with Isabel as "the real sacrament of the supper"; (p. 228) when he goes to the city he lives at "the Apostles;" as he sets out to commit the act that brings his death he takes up the position of the cross: "He turned, and entered the corridor, and then, with outstretched arms, paused between the two outer doors of Isabel and Lucy" (p. 499).



These superficial parallels with the life of Christ, however, only serve to emphasize, as in Moby Dick, the contrast between Christ and the hero: Christ sacrificed himself to save humanity; Pierre is concerned only with moral self-glorification. Christ's concern for his mother at the foot of the cross is one of the tenderest moments in the story of his life; Pierre develops a matricidal hatred for his mother, which finally destroys her. Christ sublimated his erotic energy into a self-sacrificing love for all mankind; Pierre is a victim of "the primordial conflict over incest."<sup>22</sup> Pierre, like Ahab, is a tragic anti-Christ too morally weak to gain mastery over his passions, but who, unlike Ahab, mistakes those passions for the highest Truth, and insists on opposing them to the paternal wisdom.

In this opposition to paternal wisdom Pierre and Ahab are also both Promethean rebels. Melville is deliberate in this suggestion, implying the Titanism of both heroes in his references to Prometheus (Moby Dick, p. 199) and to Enceladus (Pierre, p. 483). But whereas Prometheus, like Christ, was a champion of mankind, Ahab and Pierre champion their own narcissistic images.

Pierre would have done well to heed the lesson of Plotinus Plinlimmon's pamphlet on "Chronometricals and Horologicals," which embodies Melville's lesson to the world: There is a Divine Truth which certain rare messengers of God, such as Christ, embody perfectly and absolutely, but for the rest of us imperfect beings it is both wiser and safer to follow "man's truth," which is not so far out of our reach. We cannot rely on the purity and accuracy of our "so-called intuitions of right and wrong" (p. 294) and even if we could, these intuitions would come into conflict with "the local standards" of the world and work "woe and death" (p. 294).

Pierre's refusal to heed this lesson results in his spiritual castration and death. He renounces the moral laws of the world, the paternal principle, to follow the intuitive promptings of his "anima" (soul-image, mother-imago), recognizing his tragic error only after he is irrevocably committed to Isabel. The melodramatic moment of truth comes just before his death when he takes a vial of poison from the bosom of Isabel with the words, "in thy breasts, life for infants lodgeth not, but death-milk for



thee and me!" (p. 503). Although Pierre has finally recognized that Isabel represents death as well as life, he dies still deluded about himself. Having arrived at the existential position that Virtue and Vice are "two shadows cast by one nothing" (p. 382), he imagines that suicide is an act of self-assertion, committed independently of both his "Good Angel" and his "Bad Angel," that he is making a decision, to use a phrase from Camus, "without the aid of eternal values," when in fact suicide is the ultimate commitment to the mother-imago:

Here, then, is the untimely, timely end;--Life's last chapter well stitched into the middle! Nor book, nor author of the book, hath any sequel, though each hath its last lettering!--It is ambiguous still. Had I been heartless now, disowned, and spurningly portioned off the girl at Saddle Meadows, then had I been happy through a long life on earth, and perchance through a long eternity in heaven! Now, 'tis merely hell in both worlds. Well, be it hell. I will mould a trumpet of the flames, and, with my breath of flame, breathe back my defiance! . . . . Away!--Good Angel and Bad Angel both!--For Pierre is neuter now!"  
 (pp. 502-503)

The word "neuter" is one of Melville's cleverest ironic puns. Pierre means by the word that the forces represented by Lucy and Isabel have cancelled each other out, have "neutralized" each other, so that he is no longer committed to either, but the final image of the book is that of Pierre's body enveloped in Isabel's black hair. Like the rock figure of Enceladus dug out of the side of the Mount of Titans only as far as his waist so that he was left impotent, "without one serviceable ball-and socket above the thigh" (p. 482), Pierre is also "neuter"; for he has been castrated by the devouring mother-imago.

Pierre is not the work of an insane man, nor a record of "Melville's unconditional surrender to the forces of the unconscious."<sup>23</sup> Pierre's surrender is not Melville's. It is rather Melville's plea to adolescent America for the development of consciousness, a warning against the unconscious, destructive innocence that ignores "The Ambiguities" and seeks the meaning of life in absolutes such as Truth or Freedom, and "Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness."



FOOTNOTES

CHAPTER I

<sup>1</sup> Moby Dick, p. 161.

<sup>2</sup> Letters, p. 146.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 146.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 146.

<sup>5</sup> Arvin, p. 165.

<sup>6</sup> Moby Dick, p. 202.

<sup>7</sup> Hawthorne, p. 432.

<sup>8</sup> Eliade, The Myth of the Eternal Return, p. 165.

<sup>9</sup> Jung, Symbols of Transformation, p. 158.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 324.

<sup>11</sup> Jung, Symbols of Transformation, p. 437. See also p. 330, where Jung says:

The "mother," as the first incarnation of the anima archetype, personifies in fact the whole unconscious. Hence the regression leads back only apparently to the mother; in reality she is the gateway into the unconscious, in the "realm of the Mothers." Whoever sets foot in this realm submits his conscious ego-personality to the controlling influence of the unconscious, or if he feels that he has got caught by mistake, or that somebody has tricked him into it, he will defend himself desperately, though his resistance will not turn out to his advantage. For regression, if left undisturbed, does not stop short at the "mother" but goes back beyond her to the prenatal realm of the "Eternal Feminine," to the immemorial world of archetypal possibilities where "thronged round with images of all creation," slumbers the "divine child," patiently awaiting his conscious realization. This son is the germ of wholeness. . . .

<sup>12</sup> Sedgwick, p. 18.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 15.

<sup>14</sup> See Arvin's Herman Melville.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 170.

<sup>16</sup> Jung, Symbols of Transformation, p. 204.



<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 205.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 222.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 222.

<sup>20</sup> One of the reasons she is worshipped rather than understood.

<sup>21</sup> This is the title of Graves' study of mythological themes in poetry. See Bibliography.

<sup>22</sup> This explanation of the "anima" is a condensation of Jung's theory as found in a number of his works, principally Symbols of Transformation and "Archetypes of the Collective Unconscious" in Basic Writings.

<sup>23</sup> Jung, Symbols of Transformation, p. 137.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 105.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 283.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 297.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 223.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 213.

<sup>29</sup> Moby Dick, p. 235.

<sup>30</sup> Mason, p. 111.

<sup>31</sup> Adams, p. 198.

<sup>32</sup> Mumford, p. 201.

<sup>33</sup> Pierre, p. 87.

<sup>34</sup> Chase, The American Novel, p. 91.

<sup>35</sup> Briffault, vol. III, p. 509.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 510.

<sup>37</sup> Jung, Symbols of Transformation, pp. 235-236.

<sup>38</sup> Eliade, Myths, Dreams, and Mysteries, p. 16.

<sup>39</sup> Arvin, p. 167.



## CHAPTER II

<sup>1</sup> Letters, p. 130.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 86.

<sup>3</sup> Jung, Psyche and Symbol, p. 10.

<sup>4</sup> Jung, Symbols of Transformation, p. 261.

<sup>5</sup> Arvin, p. 15.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 18.

<sup>7</sup> Mumford, p. 15.

<sup>8</sup> Mason, p. 173.

<sup>9</sup> Arvin, p. 17.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 23.

<sup>11</sup> Mumford, p. 25.

<sup>12</sup> Gilman, p. 63.

<sup>13</sup> Weaver, p. 62.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 60.

<sup>15</sup> Mumford, p. 18.

<sup>16</sup> Arvin, p. 29.

<sup>17</sup> Jung, Symbols of Transformation, p. 261. (We remind the reader too, apropos of the new role thrust upon Maria Melville by her husband's death, that it was at this time that she changed the spelling of the family name from 'Melvill' to 'Melville.' See Leyda, vol. I, p. 53.)

<sup>18</sup> Gilman, p. 10.

<sup>19</sup> Mumford, p. 14.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 14.

<sup>21</sup> Weaver, p. 60.

<sup>22</sup> Metcalfe, p. 25.

<sup>23</sup> Gilman, p. 124.

<sup>24</sup> Arvin, pp. 33-34.



<sup>25</sup> Jung, Symbols of Transformation, p. 351.

<sup>26</sup> Mason, p. 17.

<sup>27</sup> Metcalfe, p. 20.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 20.

<sup>29</sup> Gilman, p. 124.

<sup>30</sup> Metcalfe, p. 14.

<sup>31</sup> Jung, Symbols of Transformation, p. 235.

<sup>32</sup> Moby Dick, p. 191.

<sup>33</sup> Jung, Symbols of Transformation, p. 218.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 251.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 275.

<sup>36</sup> Letters, p. 142.

<sup>37</sup> Mumford, p. 220.

<sup>38</sup> Arvin, p. 28.

<sup>39</sup> Jung, Symbols of Transformation, p. 208.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p. 214.

### CHAPTER III

<sup>1</sup> Metcalfe, p. 130.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 143.

<sup>3</sup> Chase, Herman Melville, p. 35.

<sup>4</sup> Jung, Symbols of Transformation, p. 341 and p. 373.

<sup>5</sup> Eliade, Myths, Dreams, and Mysteries, p. 155ff.

<sup>6</sup> Shulman, p. 187.

<sup>7</sup> Jung, Symbols of Transformation, p. 165.

<sup>8</sup> Fiedler, pp. 362-363.



<sup>9</sup> Jung, Symbols of Transformation, p. 434.

<sup>10</sup> Chase, Herman Melville, p. 12.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 12.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 12.

<sup>13</sup> Briffault, vol. III, pp. 514-515.

<sup>14</sup> Fiedler, p. 361.

<sup>15</sup> Arvin, p. 130.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 131.

<sup>17</sup> Chase, Herman Melville, p. 294.

<sup>18</sup> Hetherington, p. 183.

<sup>19</sup> Chase, Herman Melville, p. 24.

<sup>20</sup> Weaver, p. 239.

<sup>21</sup> Fiedler, p. 522.

<sup>22</sup> Letters, p. 130.

#### CHAPTER IV

<sup>1</sup> Chase, Herman Melville, p. 21.

<sup>2</sup> Homans, p. 701.

<sup>3</sup> Letters, p. 70.

<sup>4</sup> Hetherington, p. 125.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 115.

<sup>6</sup> Jung, Symbols of Transformation, p. 322 ff.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 322.

<sup>8</sup> Finkelstein, p. 193.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 205.

<sup>10</sup> Jung, Symbols of Transformation, p. 368.



<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 89.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 88.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 322.

<sup>14</sup> Finkelstein, p. 205.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 204.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 195.

<sup>17</sup> Jung, Symbols of Transformation, p. 394.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., See Ch. VI, "Battle for Deliverance from the Mother."

<sup>19</sup> The pearl appears in the religious symbolism of the East as "the jewel" at the centre of the lotus, and throughout the literature of the West, from "The Pearl," a Middle English Poem, to Hawthorne's The Scarlet Letter.

<sup>20</sup> Eliade, Images and Symbols, p. 330.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 125.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 146.

<sup>23</sup> There is a later reference to the pearl and the rose in Babbalanja's words to Yoomy, the poet: "Not a song you sing, but I have thought its thought; and where dull Mardi sees but your rose, I unfold its petals, and disclose a pearl" (p. 361). The association of the rose with the poet, representing the instinctual, intuitive, "unconscious" side of man, and the philosopher with the pearl, representing the reasonable, "conscious" side is consistent with our argument.

<sup>24</sup> Finkelstein, p. 221.

<sup>25</sup> Jung, Symbols of Transformation, pp. 171-206.

<sup>26</sup> Jung, Psyche and Symbol, p. 9.

## CHAPTER V

<sup>1</sup> Jung, Symbols of Transformation, p. 308.

<sup>2</sup> Ingersoll, p. 62.

<sup>3</sup> Eliade, Images and Symbols, p. 151. (See also Jones, p. 284.)



<sup>4</sup> Jung, Symbols of Transformation, p. 328.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 328.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 248.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 210.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 248.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 210.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 348.

<sup>11</sup> Ingersoll, p. 13.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 15.

<sup>13</sup> Jung, Symbols of Transformation, p. 259.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 273.

<sup>15</sup> Ingersoll, p. 110.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 88.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 111.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 110.

<sup>19</sup> Eliade, Images and Symbols, p. 15.

<sup>20</sup> Jung, Symbols of Transformation, p. 327.

<sup>21</sup> Ingersoll, p. 14.

<sup>22</sup> According to Jones, the word "nightmare" is etymologically connected with the word "mare" meaning a female horse, one of the mythological and oneiric symbols of "the primordial conflict over incest." (See especially p. 6, and pp. 243-247.)

<sup>23</sup> In spite of its phallic characteristics, Jung sees the horse as a symbol of the "mother-libido." (See p. 421).

<sup>24</sup> Jung, Symbols of Transformation, pp. 179-182.

<sup>25</sup> See Shulman, "The Serious Functions of Melville's Phallic Jokes," AL, XXIII (1961).

<sup>26</sup> Jung, Symbols of Transformation, p. 221.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 261.



<sup>28</sup> Ingersoll, p. 58.

<sup>29</sup> It is interesting to compare with Jung's interpretation of the pattern that of Ernest Jones, a leading representative of the Freudian school, who says in The Nightmare that a fight with a sea monster "represents ultimately the infantile sadistic conception of coitus, together with the assault on the father's penis that is so closely associated with the maternal genitalia." Jones' view provides a further explanation of the bi-sexuality of Melville's whale.

<sup>30</sup> Jung, Symbols of Transformation, p. 347.

<sup>31</sup> Jung, Psyche and Symbol, p. 30.

<sup>32</sup> Jung, Symbols of Transformation, pp. 262-263.

<sup>33</sup> Jung, Psyche and Symbol, p. 39.

<sup>34</sup> Letters, p. 133.

<sup>35</sup> Arvin, p. 175.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 172.

<sup>37</sup> Fiedler, p. 548.

<sup>38</sup> Jung, Symbols of Transformation, p. 209.

## CHAPTER VI

<sup>1</sup> Letters, p. 143.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 150.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 146.

<sup>4</sup> Hetherington, p. 229.

<sup>5</sup> Metcalfe, p. 135.

<sup>6</sup> Letters, p. 150.

<sup>7</sup> Murray, Introduction to Pierre, p. xcvi.

<sup>8</sup> Chase, Herman Melville, p. 138.

<sup>9</sup> Murray, Introduction to Pierre, p. xxiii.

<sup>10</sup> For a list of the images, see Moerman, *passim*.



<sup>11</sup>Frye, p. 200.

<sup>12</sup>Jung, Symbols of Transformation, p. 388.

<sup>13</sup>Carpenter, p. 258.

<sup>14</sup>For a discussion of this imagery see Moorman, passim.

<sup>15</sup>Frye, p. 200.

<sup>16</sup>Murray, Introduction to Pierre, p. xliv.

<sup>17</sup>For a full discussion of the significance of Isabel's hair and her guitar see Moorman, pp. 23-24.

<sup>18</sup>See Murray, Introduction to Pierre, p. liv, and Chase, Herman Melville, p. 115 and p. 134.

<sup>19</sup>Chase, Herman Melville, p. 134.

<sup>20</sup>Jung, Symbols of Transformation, p. 208.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 216.

<sup>22</sup>Jones, p. 6.

<sup>23</sup>Murray, Introduction to Pierre, p. xcvi.



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